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Vol. I

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BEHIND THE SCENES;

OR,
OUT WITH A NEW YORK COMBINATION.

By **PETER PAD.**



Josh was standing on the steps right full in front of everybody, and in less than three minutes there was a crowd gathered, and the greatest excitement was at once on foot. Josh was paralyzed and gazed wildly around upon the laughing, guying crowd.

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BEHIND THE SCENES;

OR,

Out With a New York Combination.

By PETER PAD,

Author of "The Shortys Out Fishing," "Sam," "The Funny Four," "Joe Junk the Whaler," "Bob Rollick, the Yankee Notion Drummer," "The Shortys Married and Settled Down," "Bob Rollick; or, What Was He Born For?" "Ebenezer Crow," "Stump; or, Little, but Oh, My!" "Chips and Chin-Chin," "Stuttering Sam," "Tommy Bounce," "Tom, Dick, and the —," "Shorty; or, Kicked Into Good Luck," "Shorty in Search of His Dad," "Tommy Dodd," "The Shortys' Trip Around the World," "Tumbling Tim," "Boarding-School," "The Shortys Out for Fun," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

WELL, boys, this isn't exactly a school story, such as I have been giving you of late, and yet it is a school story—only not exactly the kind you have been used to, either in life or in story.

It is to be a story of some phases of life on the stage and on the road, mostly comical, and the best of it is that it is founded on fact, the characters being real personages, many of whom will be recognized by theater-going people.

The opening events transpired right here in New York, and I was fortunately familiar with the whole thing and with many of the characters.

Now, are you all ready?

Well, let her go.

"Colonel" Suckerbait was a theatrical agent, having an office on Union Square, the headquarters of the profession, and in his employ, as clerk and office-boy, was Dick Dingle, a handsome, talented, wide-awake young fellow of about eighteen, of whom we shall learn more presently.

Suckerbait had been an unfortunate manager himself, never being able to succeed with anything, and had probably stranded more companies and combinations on the road than any other man, and yet he was always ready to start again, provided he could get somebody to furnish the money.

At the opening of our story he was big with another money-making scheme. He had got hold of a new comedy from somebody—had his combination all selected—in his mind—and now, as often before, he wanted to find somebody to furnish the money necessary to putting it on the road, confident that there were thousands in it.

But those who knew him wouldn't advance a cent. Too many of them had lost money by his speculations, and wouldn't have any more of him.

So he tried advertising, and shortly afterwards the following "ad" appeared in the *New York Herald*:

"WANTED.—A partner with ten thousand dollars, in a theatrical enterprise, out of which much money can be made. The investor to have the handling of his own money. Apply to Colonel Suckerbait, No. — Union Square."

The knowing ones only smiled when they read it, but everybody is not supposed to be knowing.

The morning of its appearance Suckerbait bustled into his office bright and early.

He hadn't the price of a breakfast about him, but he was used to that, and a stranger would have been easily misled by his style, and taken him for a man of money and consequence.

Dick Dingle was there ahead of him, and having put the office to rights, was seated at one of the windows reading a morning paper.

"Ah, Dick, my boy, good-morning!" said he,

bustling about, hanging up his hat, and finally taking a seat at his long table.

The office was adorned with all sorts of show-bills, photographs, etc., to give a stranger the idea that he did a large business, and enjoyed the confidence of the entire profession, from Booth down to Davis.

And to add to this make-believe—for he really did but little business—he had two dummy telephones (as though one was not enough); and, in fact, everything about the place was show and make-believe, like the owner.

"Good-morning," said Dick, but not very heartily, as he hadn't received any pay in a long time.

"Well, is the 'ad' in all right?"

"Yes, all right."

"Ah, that's good! Let me see the paper, please."

And taking it, he read his "want" with a smile and several nods of satisfaction.

Dick was watching him.

"You composed that very well, Dick, and I think I shall promote you to be my private secretary, which, of course, means more salary."

"Oh, never mind," replied Dick, turning away.

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't care about having my salary increased, if you don't object."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's more than I can do to get my present one, and if it is increased, I fear it would be too much for me to do."

"What?"

"To collect it."

"Oh, pshaw, Dick! that's all right. I am a trifle hard up just now. I know, but this 'ad' will bring me an angel, I am sure. I shall have money, and be able to pay off all my old scores."

"But in this instance you say that the investor can have the handling of his own money."

"Ah, my boy, that's all right; so he shall—while he is counting it out to me—never again," said Suckerbait, getting up and walking back and forth. "Just let me get an angel with ten thousand dollars, and see how I'll manage things. And, by the bye, I want you and Africanus Muff to be on hand to assist when he is once trapped. Keep that telephone jumping in keeping up imaginary conversations with the big guns of the profession looking for places. Have a few of our regulars here to make things look lively, and all that. You understand?"

"Well, I ought to by this time," said Dick.

"Of course. You are a bright young fellow, and I shall make something big of you yet. But there'll be no callers yet awhile. By the way—" he added, going through his pockets, with a fine look of anxiety on his face.

"What is it, sir?"

"Confound it. I came away in such a hurry, that I forgot to take any money. Got a dollar, Dick?" he added, turning to him, cheerfully.

"A dollar!" exclaimed Dick; "I didn't know there was so much money in circulation. Whew! you take my breath away."

"Oh, pshaw! How much have you got?"

"Ten cents."

"Well, let me have that. I haven't had any breakfast, and that will buy a roll and cup of coffee at No-Smile Johnny's. Hurry up."

Reluctantly Dick handed him the dime. He said "Good-bye" to it, knowing he would never see it again, and Suckerbait rushed from the office.

"Well, that is something of a come down," mused Dick, resuming his paper, "but I'll bet the old duffer would have taken it if it had only been a nickel. I hope he will catch a sucker by this advertisement, for I want to get out on the road. He has given me a little part in this new play and I think I can make a big one of it. And besides, I'm rather sweet on Gracie Montrose, who is to be one of the combination. Gracie Montrose isn't her name. It is Mary Mullony, but that don't make any odds: she's awfully nice, and very ambitious, like myself. Hello, Muff!"

This was to Africanus Muff, a colored bill-poster who hung around Suckerbait's office in the hope of getting jobs, for which privilege he did errands and made himself generally useful to the colonel.

"Ah, there, Dick! Whar am de colonel?"

"Gone to Delmonico's to breakfast," replied Dick, without looking up from his paper.

"Delmonico's—Delmonico's? Hab he struck a bone?" asked the darkey.

"Yes."

"How big, Dick?"

"Ten cents."

"An' gone to Delmonico's wid ten cents?"

"Well, perhaps he counted his funds after he left the office, and went to No-Smile-Johnny's," said Dick, smiling.

"Oh! Well, am dar anything new? Any job for me?" he asked, after finishing his laugh.

"Yes."

"Dat so? What am it, Dick?"

"The old man has advertised for a sucker, and he wants you to hang around to help make a show, providing one happens to nibble."

"Golly, I'se 'bout tired ob dat racket. I hab help to work it afore; but somehow de suckers don't bite," replied Muff.

"Well, we can try it once more."

"Wish he would catch a sucker long 'nough ter let me get my money."

"So do I; and a great many others, probably, wish the same thing. Go and find Shanky Jim and that stage-struck Dora, and have them show up this afternoon for business. They understand what it is. And you might ask up some of the gillies you find on the Square."

"Want to make a big show off?"

"Big."

"Is he gwine to take out another combination?"

"Yes, if he catches the boodle."
 "Golly, hope he will; fo' I'se gwine 'long wid him to superintend de bill-postin'," and the darkey cut a figure of delight on the office floor.
 "All right. I'm going along as well."
 "What you gwine to do?"
 "Act."
 "Act! De colonel says you can't act."
 "He does, eh? I'll show him whether I can or not. I say, Muff," said Dick, throwing aside his paper and taking him by the arm; "did you know that I've been practicing on make-ups lately?"
 "No; hab you, though?"
 "Yes, I have got quite a number of well-known characters down pretty fine, I think, and so does Gracie."
 "Oh, Gracie!" exclaimed the darkey, fervently.
 "Yes; and do you know, I am just going to show old Suckerbait whether I can act or not."
 "How dat?"
 "Mum, now. He'll be back presently, and I'll make up for a sucker answering his 'ad.' You stay here and see the fun while I go and make up. You must make believe that you think I'm a real sucker."
 "All right, Dick. I'll help you."
 "Mum, now!" added he, going from the office and leaving it in charge of Muff.
 But the day was young yet, and there was no business doing, so the place was just as safe with the darkey as with anybody else.
 "I'se boss now," he chuckled. "Wish some ob dem hamfatters would come in, so I could gib 'em some guff; dem chaps dat cork up an' think they can dance like darkeys."
 Just then Colonel Suckerbait returned. He had his plug hat tipped so far over his eyes that it nearly touched the cheap cigar he had managed to catch on to in some way, besides his roll and cup of coffee, for the ten cents.
 Although, as he marched in, contentedly swinging his cane back and forth, a stranger would certainly have thought that he had broken his fast at Delmonico's or the Brunswick.
 "Good mo'nin', colonel," said Muff, bowing.
 The colonel didn't vouchsafe to make any reply until after he had hung up his hat and taken a seat in his chair. Then he blew a long streak of rather queer smoke up towards the ceiling, and said:
 "Hello, Africanus. Where is Dick?"
 "Guess he hab gone out for some breakfast, sah."
 "The deuce he has! Then the rascal had more than the ten cents I borrowed of him. I suspect he is robbing me. (Muff turned away to hide a grin.) At all events, I shall never repay him the ten cents; that is settled anyhow. Did he tell you what I wanted?"
 "Yes, sah. Same ole snap."
 "Exactly; and if you work it right, I will take you along and make your fortune. You shall be my body-servant, besides having charge of the bill-posting. See?"
 "Yes, sah."
 "You know how to work the bell on that dummy telephone. Well, in case Dick isn't here, or is busy, you work it as you did the other day. And you know those telegraph dispatches. Well, keep bringing them in to me. But you understand it all."
 "Yes, sah; but s'posen nobody comes?"
 "Oh, I guess somebody will bite. Ah! who is that?" he asked, startled by a rap on the door.
 "Wait a moment," he added, rushing for a blank-book and a lot of papers. "Admit him."
 By this time the colonel was deep in his duties—so deep that he didn't notice that Muff admitted a lady, a stunner in high feather and heels—and he began to say:
 "Now, Muff, you take this contract up to Clara Morris, and—when he heard the darkey say: "Ah! good-mo'nin', Miss Vandevere; walk right in; de colonel will be glad to see you."
 Suckerbait wilted for a moment. It was Miss Angelia Vandevere, the ambitious young lady who had been with him on one or two of his unfortunate theatrical expeditions, and to whom he had made big promises for future advancement, in lieu of the salary he owed her.
 She was a beautiful, sparkling blonde, with some talent and considerable vanity, but rather a "card" on the road where people are not used to first-class acting.
 "Ah! good-morning, Miss Angelia. You are looking as bright and resplendent as the morning itself. Pray be seated," said he.
 "Thanks," said the stage beauty, fitting herself to a chair with much flourish and grace.
 "And how is the world using you?"
 "Not very well, colonel. Are you ever going to pay me my salary or get me an engagement?"
 "Ah! my dear girl, I am glad you came in this morning. I have advertised for a partner with ten thousand dollars, and I want you to remain

here and help me cage the angel, should one chance to nibble at the bait."
 "How?"
 "Why, your beauty—your talent—your sweet fluency of speech. You can do much towards clinching a bargain."
 "Oh, mash, eh?" she asked, artfully.
 "Exactly. You know how it is done. I will introduce you as my star, and you can work the rest. See? Ah!" and hearing a knock at the office door, he hurried back to his table and motioned Muff to admit the knocker.
 Muff opened the door and admitted a middle-aged man, evidently a stranger in the city, and while the colonel pretended to be very busy with his lady patron, the man asked:
 "Is this Colonel Suckerbait's office?"
 "Yes, sah. Walk right in. Dat am de colonel ober dar by de table, sah," and he bustled about to provide him with a seat on his right.
 "Good-morning, sir. Whom have I the honor of addressing?" asked the suave agent.
 "My name is Joseph Shoehorn. I am from Troy, New York."
 "Ah! glad to see you, Mr. Shoehorn. This is Miss Angelia Vandevere, the celebrated comedienne," he added, introducing him to the star.
 She rose and bowed the killingest kind of a stage bow, which he returned awkwardly, saying in the same way how glad he was to meet a lady of whom he had heard so much.
 "Now, pray, sir, what can I do for you?"
 "You advertised for a partner?"
 "Yes, sir. I have a new play and a fine company engaged to take on the road. Unfortunately, my ready money is so tied up that I cannot make use of it at present, and for that reason I advertised. Have you had any experience in the show business?"
 "Not much; no, sir; but I have always thought I should like to have. I suppose you have numerous references?"
 "Oh, any quantity of them, and the best. You, of course, have the ready money?"
 "Undoubtedly, if the conditions are satisfactory."
 "Conditions, my dear Shoehorn, conditions! If making money hand over fist may be considered good conditions, why, they are in the case."
 "When do you propose to start out?"
 "Within a week or so. I have everything nearly ready, and as soon as we close our bargain I will complete everything," said he, pulling a string that rang the bell of the telephone. "One moment, please."
 Then he sat up and pretended to hold a conversation with some imaginary celebrity relative to joining his combination.
 "Well, I will let you know to-morrow; goodbye," he added, again turning to the stranger.
 But that stranger was no stranger. It was simply Dick Dingle, who had removed his disguise while the colonel's back was turned, and now sat bolt upright, looking as honest as an owl.
 Suckerbait staggered backwards. He glanced around in search of Shoehorn. He couldn't believe his eyes or use his tongue for a moment.
 But Miss Vandevere's musical laugh, together with the coarser one of Africanus Muff, finally broke the spell that was on him.
 "Dick Dingle, did you play that on me?"
 "And very cleverly played, too," said Miss Vandevere, laughing still heartier.
 "Well, sir, you said I couldn't act, and so I thought I'd show you whether I could or not," said Dick, laughing.
 "Allow me to congratulate you," said Miss Vandevere, offering him her hand. "Very, very good."
 "Thanks."
 "Well, good or bad, if I ever catch you at such a trick again, I'll just murder you," said the disgusted colonel, turning away.
 Suckerbait gazed out of the window at the throngs and the bustle on Union Square.
 Dick and Muff shook hands and swapped congratulations in pantomime, while Angelia got behind a paper to read.
 So much ammunition lost!
 "You are altogether too fresh, Dick Dingle, and if you don't take a vinegar bath, I'll discharge you," growled the colonel.
 "Going to put a wad—of greenbacks—on top of your discharge?" asked Dick.
 "Oh, shut up!" and he resumed his seat, pretending to work, although he had nothing to do.
 "I guess I'll call again," said Miss Vandevere, rising to go, after a moment's silence.
 "No, no; don't go yet. Muff, go and do as I told you to do and have them here by noon."
 "Yes, sah," and Muff skipped.
 "No, don't be in a hurry. Here is the play. Perhaps you would like to read it," he said, handing her a book of manuscript.
 "Yes, I would," and she sat down by the

window to see how good her part was, while Dick put up some more show-bills and lithographs of distinguished actors and actresses.
 Outside of this there was silence for the space of ten minutes, when Muff returned and announced that he had done as directed.
 Then the colonel began to whistle. He had his eye on Dick, however, for as a mimic he was altogether too skillful for office use, and he was bound not to be fooled again.
 Presently a song-and-dance man came in, but knowing what was expected of him, he merely nodded and lounged into a chair. Then a young lady who aspired to be an operatic star came in, and Suckerbait let her warble, thinking that perhaps it might change his luck.
 And while she was trilling and splitting ear-drums, Miss Gracie Montrose, a stage-struck beauty, came in, and Dick was all attention to her, introducing her to Miss Vandevere, the star, and soon after Claudina Kutejack and De Arcy Dunellen, the leading man, came in.
 And so quite a company got together, and there was considerable appearance of business.
 But the colonel was looking for somebody he didn't owe money to, and so paid but little attention to those around him.
 If he failed in this, he was a gone-up community.
 Presently Billy Pratt, a half-way sort of an actor, who was always on the eve of getting a big engagement, but never did, came in. Glancing around and nodding to those he knew, he walked over to Suckerbait and whispered in his unattentive ear, but it instantly startled him.
 He leaped to his feet.
 "Is that so? Where was he?" he asked, eagerly.
 "Over here by the Morton House."
 "And asked for me?"
 "Yes. He's a regular jay; a grip-sack in each hand, and evidently from away back."
 "And you told him where to find me?"
 "Of course I did. Didn't I see your 'ad' in the *Herald*, and didn't I suspect he was a sucker? Say, give me an engagement if you catch him."
 "Of course I will, Billy," said he, shaking him warmly by the hand. "Now, my friends, make things lively for this jay when he comes in, for I guess he's the chap I am looking for."
 "All right," they said.
 "Just get in that song and dance. Whoop up something from 'Norma,' and make things look business-like," he added, resuming his seat at the table.
 "Dick, mind that telephone."
 "All right."
 "Muff, attend to the door. Open locks who-ever knocks."
 "Yes, sah; but s'posen nobody knocks?" asked the darkey, with a big grin.
 "Then go outside and knock and let yourself in."
 "All right, sah."
 "And here is a nice little speech that I will read him," said Miss Vandevere.
 "That's right."
 "He shall be my *Romeo* and I his *Juliet*," exclaimed Gracie Montrose, in sweetened tragedy.
 "I will be *Damon* and he my *Pythias*," said Dunellen, in tragic tones, unsweetened.
 "Yes, I hope he'll pity us," said Pratt, who could pun just about as well as he could act.
 "Look out and see if he is coming."
 "Hark! do we hear the rustle of the 'angel's' wings?" asked Dick, as Pratt poked his head out of the window to reconnoiter.
 "Yes, here he comes! He has probably been studying the signs, so he wouldn't get lost. He is just coming in the door down-stairs."
 "I'm afraid he is too raw," mused Suckerbait.
 "Oh, well, we'll cook him," said Miss Vandevere.
 "Hush! Now to business."
 The song-and-dance young man began his fancy steps and the opera singer began to wrestle with "Norma," with rather a poor show for that heroine, while Suckerbait became busy with his books and papers, and everybody seemed to be doing something of importance.
 In the midst of all this there came a loud rap on the office door, which Muff threw open, and there stood the "angel" with a gripsack in either hand and wearing a look of astonishment.
 He was a young, not bad-looking, man, unmistakably a countryman, with a long linen duster, and a plug hat that probably once belonged to his father or grandfather, and this was about all one could see of him.
 "Walk right in, sah," said Muff, politely, and he slowly ventured into the room.
 Nearly everybody present rushed towards him with extended hands, some calling him Denman Thompson, others John E. Owens; in fact, they all pretended to mistake him for somebody of that ilk.

"Wal, b' gosh! mighty!" exclaimed the astonished and bewildered countryman, dropping both gripsacks, which Muff and Dick caught up for safe-keeping. "Whar in thunder be I?"

"In my dramatic lyceum, sir," said Colonel Suckerbait, looking up from his work.

"Oh, 'tis, eh? Didn't know but I had made a mistake and got into a lunatic asylum," said the stranger, looking around. "Whar can I find the man that put this 'ere piece inter ther paper?" he added, pulling a *Herald* from his coat-pocket.

"Let me see it," said Suckerbait, approaching him, at the same time holding up his hand as a signal for the noise to stop. "Ah! I am the man you are looking for. Take a seat," said he, and both Muff and Dick Dingle assisted him in getting into a chair near the colonel and in disposing of his comical plug.

"Wal, b' gosh!" he ejaculated again.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Wal, if yu mean me, my name's Joshua Sheepshank, from Vermont."

"Ah! glad to meet you, Mr. Sheepshank," said the colonel, seizing his hand.

But he received as hard a squeeze as he gave.

"This is a part of my company, and I have them come here once a week, in order to see how they are getting along."

"Got some purty nice gurls here," said he, glancing bashfully at them.

"Oh, yes; very handsome and talented. So you saw my advertisement?"

"Yes. Bought a paper on the keers, and almost the fust thing I popped my eyes on was that."

"Ah! nothing like advertising, my dear sir, if you want anything."

"Yes; I s'pose so. Dad used to advertise in the *Liberty Flats Buglehorn* whenever he had a yoke of steers ter sell."

"Which shows him to be a man of sagacity."

"Oh, dad's cute, you bet! Wal, I'll tell yu how it is with me. I'm smart, but green as grass. I s'pose. When I come twenty-one last hayin' I received ten thousand dollars, clean money, an' that's a tip-top farm that'll be mine when the old folks get done with it."

"Exactly."

"Wal, I've read heaps 'bout the speckerlations an' fortins to be made in New York, an' so I made up my mind to take my money an' just come right here with it."

"A very good thing to do, Mr. Sheepshank."

"But dad an' mother stuck agin it—wanted me to put it in the bank—said I'd be sure to lose it if I brought it here."

"Not at all, provided you invest it rightly."

"Wal, that's what I said, an' finally they told me to go ahead, but if I lost it I'd have to go back to farmin' agin, an' I hate it like pizen. I du, b'gosh."

"Very natural in a young man who wants to see the world," and the company all nodded, and echoed, "Very."

"Wal, here I am, an' so I thought I'd call on yu first and see what it was like."

"And it was a happy idea that inspired you to do so, sir. You know little or nothing about the show business, I suppose?" asked the colonel.

"Not much. Been to three or four circuses an' a few concerts. But I allus thought as how I'd like it fust-rate," he added, after meeting the bewitching eyes of Angelia Vandevere.

"Yes, sir, it is not only a delightful life, but one in which there is much money to be made. Come into my private office and I will unfold my scheme to you," said he, getting up, and in a business-like style leaning the way.

Joshua looked at the stage beauty as though he was afraid she might escape during his absence, and she made eyes to him in such a way that his heart fluttered under his vest.

"Guess I'll take my grips along, for they're full of bank-notes," said he, taking them up and following him, leaving everybody in the room mad enough to club themselves.

"Ten thousand dollars in those old grips!" exclaimed Pratt.

"And we never suspected it!"

"Well, never mind. The colonel will get it, and we shall all have a pull."

And then they all shook hands. Muff even shook with himself, and if Sheepshank could have seen the way that company cut up to express their delight, he certainly would have hesitated long enough to look into the matter.

But he was in the hands of a first-class buzzer, and was evidently stuck on the star, so much so that he agreed to almost everything that the colonel said regarding his proposed combination, in the hope of getting back to where she was again.

The wily colonel was not slow in seeing this, and so took him out into the main office, for the purpose of a further presentation to her.

"Miss Vandevere, I trust you will like and be-

come better acquainted with Mr. Sheepshank, who will probably become my partner in the enterprise which you understand so well," said he, and with a wink he withdrew and began to work his telephone, although not to the extent he would have done had his "angel" known anything about such things.

The others gathered around him, pretending to talk business, but in reality to carry on an extra undertoned slang conversation regarding the prospects.

"I guess Angle'll work it," he said to them, quietly, and then they pretended not to further notice the mash.

"I'm alfred glad to get acquainted with yu," said Joshua, grinning and blushing.

"Are you really?" she asked, artfully, and, oh, what a look she gave him.

"I be, b'gosh; I think yu're the goldarnest handsomest gurl I ever seen in my life."

"Oh, you are a flatterer. But do you seriously propose going in with the colonel?"

"Wal, now, I'd know. What du yu think 'bout it anyhow?" he asked.

"Oh, the colonel is a great manager, and the play he has got is a wonderful one, and I don't doubt but you will both make money. Dear me! I only wish I had the money to go into it."

"Du yu, though?" She nodded. "And yu're goin' to play in the play?"

"Oh, yes. I play the leading part; I am to be the star."

"Git out! Goin' to travel right along with us, yu handsome critter?" he asked, pinching her arm and giggling.

"Oh, yes. I shall be with you all the time."

"Wal, I swun, that'll be nice! Guess you ain't married, be yu?" he asked, bashfully.

"Oh, mercy, no. The idea!"

"Maybe yu got steady company?"

"No, I am wedded to my profession."

"Git out! Queer thing to be wedded to, b'gosh. I'd—I'd—say, I'd like to shin up to yu," he finally managed to say, and she coquettishly hid her face. "I would, b'gosh."

"No, no! You and I are strangers yet."

"Wal, yes; that's so, but—"

"But if we go on the road together, we shall have a chance to become better acquainted," she said, looking at him archly.

"That's so, b'gosh! Yu're goin' to stick right to us, arn't yu?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"Wal, I'll be goldarned if I don't think I'll go in with the colonel," he said, looking around.

"I would if I were you," said she, softly.

"I'm darnation glad yu arn't me, for then yu wouldn't be the alfred purty critter yu are. Don't go 'til I speak to the colonel," he added, going over to the table, where he pretended to be very busy about something.

"Well, my boy, how do you feel now?"

"Feel?" and, getting redder yet, he turned to look back at the stellar queen. "Wal, colonel, I'll be gosh darned if I don't think I'll go in with yu an' put in my soap."

"Spoken like a sensible man!" said the colonel, seizing his hand, and while he was shaking it the others also shook over the triumph. "We'll draw the partnership papers right up."

"Go it, b'gosh!" and he returned to Angelia.

CHAPTER II.

A HAPPIER company than that impecunious one was when they heard Joshua Sheepshank say that he would put his ten thousand dollars into the combination, could scarcely be found anywhere.

Even Colonel Suckerbait trembled with suppressed excitement when he attempted to write out the co-partnership papers, seeming to feel like a man who might possibly awake from a dream and find it only a bottle of smoke with the cork out.

But Joshua was happy in the company of the fascinating Angelia Vandevere, and failed even to notice that the majority of the company went out for the purpose of striking the nearest hotel and having a laughing talk over Suckerbait's success.

"Thump me," said one of them to another.

"What for?"

"Just to see if I am awake."

And then they all took turns hitting each other, and looking as serious as though it was a genuine and solemn experiment.

They finally concluded that they were all right, and that it was a veritable fact that Colonel Suckerbait had struck an angel.

Meantime, Suckerbait drew up the articles of co-partnership between himself and Sheepshank, who was all the while being entertained by Miss Vandevere, and to such an extent that he scarcely knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

But when those papers were ready to sign, Joshua Sheepshank's common sense came to him, and, after reading them over, he said he would not sign them.

"It's a little to spring on one side," said he.

"What do you mean?" demanded Suckerbait.

"Wal, all I want's what's fair. This 'ere printin'—this 'ere advertisement in the paper—says as how the investor—that's me, arn't it?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Was to have the handling of his money. Now, this says as how I'm to give it up to yu."

"But you forget, my dear boy, that I put in even more than you do—my brains, my great experience, and my name," said Suckerbait.

"Wal, yes, that may be; but they wouldn't work without soap."

"Perhaps not so effectually; therefore, we go into partnership on equal terms."

"All right. You have the handling of y'urs, and I'll handle mine," said Josh.

Now Suckerbait never suspected anything of this kind. In fact, he had at first expressed a fear that the "angel" was too green. But this looked a little sharp.

He tried to explain to him, but his good horse-sense would not have it, and the best that Suckerbait could do was to alter the papers so that Sheepshank should appear a full partner in the concern, and be the cashier.

But he finally managed it so as to get in a clause which made Sheepshank agree to honor his orders upon him, and so the agreement was signed.

"Now you want to deposit your money. I will go right over to the bank with you and give you the necessary recommendations," said Suckerbait, after everything had been arranged.

Sheepshank looked at Angelia and seemed loath to leave her, so mashed was he.

"Can't she come along?" he finally asked.

"Oh, no. I'm going home to lunch," said she, smiling, and starting towards the door.

"But say, I'll treat you," said Suckerbait.

"No, thank you."

"And remember, Miss Angelia, that your salary commences from to-day, and you must report here every day during the formation of the combination and the necessary rehearsals," said Colonel Suckerbait, with lordly importance.

"Yes, report every day, b'gosh, won't yu?" asked Josh, touching her under the chin.

"Oh, certainly. Good-bye," said she, smiling and vanishing.

"Wal, I'll be everlastingly goldarned, colonel, if she aren't the alfredest purty critter I ever sot eyes on!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, she is a remarkable girl," replied the colonel, bustling about. "Now, Dick, you just notify our people to meet here at once, so that we can get the company into working shape without loss of time. We can engage the Union Square stage to rehearse. Come," he said, turning to Josh.

"All ready?"

"Yes."

"Wal, start the steers," he replied, following him from the office.

Well, at last Suckerbait had struck it rich, and a more lofty-looking and feeling individual than he was could not be found.

He was ashamed of his partner, and, after the money had been deposited, and Josh made to understand the whole business, he took him in hand for a bracing up. He showed him how other gentlemen dressed, and managed to get him into something like a presentable shape in the course of a few hours.

Colonel Suckerbait was not the worst fellow in the world. He knew the money was in the concern, and he wanted his partner to look as nobby as he did himself, so that he would not be gayed on account of him.

Well, in this part of the business Suckerbait showed more of his genius, by convincing Josh that it was the proper caper for him to give him at once—as the active partner in the concern—three or four hundred dollars for immediate current expenses.

"Sartin sure, colonel; you're the boss. Go right in an' whoop 'er up, for I'm just stuck on this 'ere business—I am, b'gosh. How du I look?" he asked, turning around.

"First-rate. You'll be all right in time. What you want is style. Watch other fellows and take pattern. See?"

"Oh, yu bet I'll get harnesssed up as good 's any on 'em. Wonder what the folks would say if they seen me now? Gosh-darned if I think they'd know me," and again he turned around and looked at himself in the mirror. "Guess that ar Angelia 'll think I'm some squash now."

"Oh, certainly. Your chances will be much better than they were before. But I must leave you now. Get your room at the hotel—I'll just go with you and speak to the clerk—and I must attend to business. Make your head-quarters over at my office, and learn all you can about the business," and, after seeing him fixed all right, he went away and left him.

Meantime, the news had spread on the "Square" of his great catch, and wherever he went he was saluted and congratulated.

But Suckerbait was almost too lofty for any of his acquaintances now. He had a new suit of clothes on, and three hundred dollars in his pocket. Whew!

Indeed, the airs he put on were huge, the which, however, caused him to be chaffed considerably.

"Say, colonel, got that quarter I lent you the other day?" asked one fellow who met him soon afterwards at the "Criterion," a well-known resort for all sorts of actors.

The colonel was just then "setting up" a bottle of wine with a couple of fellow-managers whom he met there, and the look of infinite disgust that he turned upon that poor actor, whom he had not condescended to notice until then, was a study.

But he was wise enough to relent.

"Oh, hello, Jack, my boy, didn't see you. Put up another glass, Charlie," said he, and while shaking hands with his creditor he put a two-dollar bill in his palm.

"Well, say, colonel, I hear he is a regular jay, from Jayville," said one of the managers.

"Nonsense. He was faked up for effect when those hamfatters saw him, but I assure you, gentlemen, that he is a good one, and the 'shug' is right over here in the bank—that is, with some slight exceptions," he added, pulling out a big roll of bills of large denominations.

"Well, there's no frost on that, surely."

"I should equatorially conclude there was not. I am going to take out a combination that will charm the country. I am going to work it from here to 'Frisco and back again, and then I'll open a theater here that will knock you all out."

"All right. Go it, old man. But I'll bet you an

was the proper caper, he allowed half a dozen of them to blacken his understandings, one shine on top of another, before he finally tumbled.

That night Suckerbait took him to a theater, and while greatly astonished, he caught on to much pertaining to his future business.

"Goldarn my new clothes, but this life suits me! How many years I've hogged away up there in Vermont without seeing any life like this," said he, as they walked towards the hotel where he was stopping. "But, say, colonel, can't I take that Angelia to some theater to-morrow night?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so," replied the colonel.

"Wal, now, that would tickle me eenermost tu death—it would b'gosh! I reckon as how I look just

"Dick, we are flush now," said he, as he was on the point of going away.

"Yes, sir." "There is no longer any necessity of taking guff from creditors. If they come in here and attempt to put on any airs, just point to that notice, let them read it, and hold no further conversation with them," said he, lottily.

"All right. That'll suit me to death. Have you paid the rent?"

"Yes, paid it yesterday, and had the pleasure of making the agent feel sick with a little of my back talk. Did you notify the people?"

"Yes." "All right. When Bing comes tell him I have fixed



Josh was standing on the steps right full in front of everybody, and in less than three minutes there was a crowd gathered, and the greatest excitement was at once on foot. Josh was paralyzed and gazed wildly around upon the laughing, guying crowd.

even fifty that you come back on your uppers," replied the manager, laughing.

"Bah! The reason I never have succeeded yet is because I never had the 'shug.' Now, I have got it, and I'll show you some management."

They didn't believe it, but he did.

All that day he circulated around on the "Square," astonishing his friends, and making all sorts of engagements with all sorts of people. He also paid several debts of borrowed money, and wiped off several slates.

Indeed, he was as good as an angel himself to the proprietors of several resorts where his face had of late been very bad.

In the meantime, Joshua Sheepshank was in high feather with himself.

The colonel had exercised considerable taste in buying his clothes, and after he had fixed him from shoes to hat, he looked quite presentable, but like a countryman for all that.

It is great nonsense to say that fine feathers make fine birds. The feathers of a bird-of-paradise would not make a crow look like a bird-of-paradise.

No, the bird must be used to the feathers it wears.

Josh was not used to the stylish city clothing he had put on in place of the comical harness he had first made his appearance in, and although he looked a trifle less like a guy than he did, he still showed that he was all unused to fancy togs.

Naturally enough, he was taken in a few times by the young sharps who are always laying for suckers, but the colonel had posted him so well that they failed to get much the best of him.

The bootblacks on the Square bothered him the worst, for they were continually asking him to have a shine, and thinking they would not do so unless it

about as scrumptious as any of these city chaps, an' I'll buy her a hull pound of peppermint candy if she'll go with me."

"Oh, I've no doubt but that she will."

"That harrows me down, b'gosh!" and he laughed loud enough to attract general attention.

"But you want to keep very quiet, you know."

"How?"

"That is, don't have much to say, and say it quietly, so as not to attract notice. Everything in society is done on the strict Q. T. See?"

"You mean on the sly?"

"Yes. Never give yourself away."

With this and other admonitions, the colonel left him, assuring him that everything was working all right, and that in a few days their company would be rehearsing the play they were to astonish the country with, and that he should employ the next day with artists and printers, getting the advertising boom going.

Josh dreamed the play all over again that night, living in a world that was as strange to him as would have been a piece of the hereafter.

The next morning Colonel Suckerbait was at his office bright and early.

The first thing he did was to astonish Dick Dingle by the payment of a long arrearage of salary, and leaving something for Africanus Muff, the bill-poster and general utility.

After this he gave any number of orders regarding people and business for Dick to attend to, and then he wrote and posted up in a conspicuous place the following:

"All bills payable on Saturday at 12 M. sharp.
"COLONEL SUCKERBAIT & Co."

upon him as stage-manager, and that I want to see him at my hotel to-night sure. Tell the others that it is all right, and to report every day," saying which he strutted from the office, and started at once on business.

Dick wasn't long in getting inside of a new suit of clothes, and he had barely got back to the office when Africanus Muff came in.

"Ah, there!" said he, cheerily, while the coon looked him over.

"De sucker did bite!" he finally exclaimed.

"He did," replied Dick.

"An' he war hooked!"

"He was."

"Bress de Lord! How nice you look, Dick!"

"Yes? Well, I feel pretty good."

"I should say so; but did de colonel say anything 'bout my little William?" he asked.

"Yes, and here is a boodle for you," said Dick, handing it to him.

"Mercy sake's alive, Dick, what would dis yer life be if it warn't fo' suckers?" he asked, rolling up his eyes with much sentiment.

"A dreary waste, Muff, old man—a dreary waste."

"Right you is. Whar am he?"

"Oh, he'll be around presently. The colonel got him into new togs yesterday, took him to the theater last night, and says we would scarcely know him. But I'll bet I'd know his ashes. Wish he would come; we'd have some fun with him."

Scarcely had he made the remark, when the door opened, and in walked Joshua Sheepshank.

But what a change there was in him!

"Hello!" he said. "Know me?"

"Well, really, you must be Mr. Sheepshank, if I am not mistaken," replied Dick, soberly.

"You've hit it, sonny."
 "But you are greatly changed, sir."
 "Changed! Why, b' gosh, I'm one of the boys now, I am," said he, proudly.
 "Well, I should say so."
 "Finest dress' man in New York," ventured Muff.
 "In course I be. Didn't s'pose I war goin' tu wear them old country togs, did yu? No, siree. I'm in ther shew business now, an' yu don't s'pose I'm goin' tu harness like a gosh darned farmer, du yu?" he asked, archly.
 "Why, of course not," said Muff.
 "Besides, Colonel Suckerbait would not allow it," added Dick.
 "Oh, I tell yu, I'm right here! See them new butes?" he asked, poking out a No. 13.
 "Very fine."
 "How 'bout that for a new hat?"
 "Very nobby."
 "Jus' de style, Mr. Shanksheep," said Muff.
 "Say, yu nigger, yu got my name turned 'round," said he, indignantly.
 "I—I begs you' pardon, Mr. Ramshank."
 "Sheepshank, yu goldarned nigger!"
 "Begg you' pardon, sah."
 "Muff, be quiet. What business have you to address the gentleman, anyway? Shut up!"
 "Yes, yu sorter sugar off and get hard," added Josh.
 "Wal, how 'bout them clus? Aren't they big?" he asked, standing up.
 "Well, none too big," replied Dick, looking him over, soberly. "No, they set like a glove."
 "Bet yu this year's clip of wool they du! Never had such nice clus afore in my life. Say, where's that alfred purty gal—Angella?" he added.
 "Oh, she is busy studying her part; but she will be here later on," said Dick.
 "Wal, b' gosh, she's clean taller, she is, by thunder! Wonder what she'll think of me?"
 "Oh, she can't but be favorably impressed with you," said Dick.
 "Say, wonder if I couldn't be an actor?"
 "Most undoubtedly."
 "What be them things up there?" he asked, pointing to a show-case containing a lot of theatrical costumes.
 Dick explained them.
 "Them things—that is—them cur'us clus that folks wear on the stage?"
 "The same."
 "Wal, b' gosh, I seen some gals last night that looked 'bout tu-thirds naked. Guess they don't have tu have much clus," said Josh.
 "Oh, on the contrary, they are entirely clothed," and to illustrate it, Dick took a ballet-dancer's suit from the show-case (Suckerbait sold such things on commission) and explained the arrangement.
 "Wal, I'll be goldarned! I thought as how ther critters war almost stripped stark naked. Wonder how I'd look in such a harness?" he added.
 "First-rate. Would yu like to try one on?" asked Dick, thinking there might be some fun.
 "I would, b' gosh. I would just like tu see how it seems. Got tu take off my clus, though, eh?"
 "Oh, certainly. But you can put your boots on after you've got on the tights."
 "All right, b' gosh. I'll du it. Anybody likely tu come in?" he asked.
 "Oh, no. Too early."
 "Then, b' gosh, I'm goin' tu be a fantastic dancin' gal, such as I seen last night," and he at once began tu undress right there in the office.
 That darkey, Muff, went and got behind a big three-sheet poster to laugh, while Dick, as sober as an owl, assisted Joshua to undress and get into those tights.
 Then he told him to put on his boots. And they looked very fairy-like.
 Then he assisted him to get into the skirts and other short gear, lacing them up behind tu within about six inches of bare skin, on account of his being so much too large for them, after which he placed a blonde wig on his head, and pronounced him a splendid make-up.
 "Wal, b' gosh!" exclaimed he, looking at himself in the mirror. "How queer it feels!"
 "Why, you look just like a ballet-girl."
 "Fo' all de world!" put in Muff.
 "No wonder ther critters can dance," said Josh, cutting a caper on the office floor.
 "Great! I only wish the colonel was here. He'd see that you could be an actor," said Dick, all the while swelling with the possibilities of what might come out of it.
 "So du I, b' gosh!"
 "He am jus' next doo," said Muff.
 "Good! Say, I'll tell you what—let us go next door and astonish him," added Dick.
 "All right, b' gosh!"
 "Come on," said Dick, winking to Muff, and glancing at the spring-lock on the door.
 "Go it. Oh, won't we astonish the colonel?"
 "You bet we will," said Dick, and he led the way out of the office.
 "Follow me," he added, going down the stairs.
 Josh did follow, with a tremendous grin on his mug, and when they arrived at the bottom of the stairs, he told them to wait there until he found out whether the colonel was in the next door or not. And he skipped out.
 Josh was standing on the steps right full in front of everybody, and in less than three minutes there was a crowd gathered, and the greatest excitement was at once on foot.
 Josh was paralyzed, and gazed wildly around upon the laughing, geying crowd.
 Finally two policemen approached him, and demanded the meaning of the masquerade.
 "Wal, I'm actin' bally gal," said Josh.

"Well, I guess we'll run you in, and let you dance before the captain," said one of them, and they went for him, and he objected.
 There was a fight and a great laugh.

CHAPTER III.

THE policeman saw at once that they had a countryman, and probably would have investigated the matter had Josh not made a fight; so they yanked him, pulling off his wig and a good portion of his ballet-dancer's dress, and touched him up with their clubs, and took him before the police captain.

Africanus Muff was looking out of the window above, and was so overcome with laughter that he nearly bucked a hole through the wall with his tough head.

And as for Dick Dingle, the young rogue who got poor Sheepshank into the trouble, he was amazed at the result. His idea was simply to get the unsophisticated jay out on the street in his ridiculous make-up, and let the boys have all the fun they wanted with him.

Seeing the police march him off, he knew that the whole business would be laid to him, and so he rushed back to the office, and started Muff to the station-house with the victim's clothing.

"Tell him I am awfully sorry, Muff—that it was all a mistake. They'll let him off when they find out about it. Now hurry."

"Oh, by golly!" roared Muff.
 "That's all right; hurry up," said Dick, shoving him from the office. "I'll get slugged for this," he added, when once alone. "What a jackass that fellow is!"

Just then Colonel Suckerbait rushed in.
 "What was that crowd here? I was just told that there was somebody arrested," said he.

"Well, there was," replied Dick, looking up from where he pretended to be at work.

"Who was it?"
 "Your partner."
 "What! Sheepshank?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."
 "What for?"
 "Masquerading in public."

"What in thunder do you mean, Dick?"
 "I arn't going to tell you, colonel," said he, doggedly resuming his work.

"Why not?"
 "Because you will be sure to blame me, as you do for everything that happens."

"Dick Dingle, I suspect something," said the colonel, after looking at him a moment.
 "I suppose so. You always do."

"But what is it all about? Confound you, why don't you speak out?"
 "I just told you why," said Dick, calmly.

"But if you are not to blame, it isn't likely that I shall jump on you. Tell me."

"Well, the confounded jay came in here all dressed up, and—"

"Yes, of course. I've been getting him into shape."

"He felt awfully good, and wanted to know all about everything. He was crazy about some ballet-girls he saw with you last night."

"Well?"

"He spied the toggery up there in the case, and wanted to know all about that. I explained that it was a costume similar to those he had seen last night, and he wanted to put one on just to see how it felt. So I let him do it, thinking you would come in in time to have a laugh; but after cavorting around the office awhile, he wanted to go next door and surprise you."

"The deuce he did! Who told him I was next door?"

"Muff said somebody told him you was in there, and go he would in spite of all I could do to prevent him."

"The blamed lunatic! Well!"

"I said I would go and find you, but he followed me out, and at once got up a crowd and woke up a couple of cops."

"Yes; and—"

"They run him in, fighting."

"Confound you, Dick Dingle, I want you to let that jay alone," said Suckerbait.

"Oh, of course."

"You knew better than to allow him to put on that toggery."

"But who thought he would go on the street?"

"Well, you were wrong at first, and now I have got to go and get him out. But I hope he'll break your back when he catches you," said the indignant colonel, going from the room.

Then Dick got up and let himself out on a laugh and dance of rejoicing.

"I'll have a square mile of fun with that jay yet," he chuckled, and just then some cheap actors came in looking for "openings," and he told them all about the snap, so that they could also laugh.

Colonel Suckerbait hurried to the station-house.

He was provoked with Dick, and disgusted with his rural partner, the story of whose escapade would be sure to get them both laughed at, in and out of the profession as well.

On arriving there he found Africanus Muff. He had delivered Josh's clothes, and that unfortunate was locked up for disorderly conduct.

Suckerbait was awfully mad, but there was no help for it. The law must take its course.

He went to his cell, after explaining the matter to the captain, and there found him dressed, but still very indignant.

"What in thunder have you been doing?" was the colonel's first question.

"Wal, colonel, I guess I've got into some sort of a scrape," replied Josh, sadly.

"I should say you had. Didn't you know any bet-

ter than to go out on the street in such a costume as that?"

"Wal, I only did it for fun."

"Fun!"

"An' who'd a thort them chaps would have 'rested me for a little thing like that?"

"Why, it's against the law."

"D'nd't them gals scoot all over that stage in such kind of harness last night?"

"Yes, but that was not in public."

"Public! B'gosh thar wur five times as many folks lookin' at 'em as there was at me, an' some on 'em were usin' telescopes, tu."

"Oh, you are too green to live!" replied the colonel, turning away in disgust.

"Guess I am. What'll they du tu me?"

"Oh, fine you for disorderly conduct, I suppose. I'll see the judge and find out what can be done," said he, leaving him alone.

Joshua was sad. He could hardly understand it anyway, only he concluded he wouldn't do it again.

Well, the upshot of it all was that he got off with a fine and a reprimand, but the colonel took him in hand and gave him a good lecture, ending it by warning him to beware of Dick Dingle, who would get him into all sorts of scrapes just for the sake of making a laughing-stock of him.

But there was no use in attempting to keep such a thing quiet, for one or two of the papers got hold of it, and wrote up laughable articles on the escapade of Colonel Suckerbait's financial partner, Joshua Sheepshank.

But little things like that must not interfere with Colonel Suckerbait's great combination—that was to be—and so he spent the next day in making up his company and assigning them their parts in the great comedy he himself had written.

Yes, he wrote it himself; perhaps because there was nobody else who could do it to his satisfaction, and perhaps he wanted all the honors.

At all events, he felt certain that it was a great production, and that there was both money and immortality in "The Chump's Bride," a comedy in six acts and ten tableaux.

Angella Vandevere was to play the heroine, and De Arcy Dunellen the hero, while the minor characters were to rest upon minor people, of course.

Suckerbait finally concluded to gather new laurels and responsibility by becoming his own stage-manager and taking a prominent part.

Dick Dingle was also given a small part, of which he was very proud, and determined to make the most of it. And Muff, while he was to go along with the combination to post bills and make himself otherwise generally useful, was to have a servant's part of two lines, and any quantity of "business."

In two days' time the first rehearsal was to be had, when every member of the company was expected to be "letter perfect."

And now the colonel was full of business and importance, while his partner had nothing to do but look on and learn all he could before going upon the road.

He improved his time, however, by going to the different theaters every evening, although he could not persuade Miss Vandevere to accompany him after his adventure in tights.

Josh felt rather ashamed of this himself, and could scarcely blame any of the ladies of the company for not wishing to go with him, since he had become so well known, but he couldn't help being mashed on Angle for all that, and hoped to outgrow the laugh that was upon him.

But he always found a plenty of company, and Suckerbait made it a point to get him with those from whom he could learn something.

And yet Josh wanted female company. He saw that nearly everybody else went to places of amusement with either their best or second-best girls, and being fond of the crinoline gender generally, he yearned.

He made his yearnings known to Dick Dingle in spite of what the colonel had told him, and asked his advice.

"I can get you a girl, only she would want to go veiled," said Sam.

"Why so?"

"Well, they don't want to be laughed at on account of that old snap."

"That be goldarned! Get me a gal; I'll bet I'll make it all right," protested Josh.

"Well, it's your funeral, not mine. But I'll have a girl waiting for you to-night, quarter of eight, right out here on the corner of Fourth avenue and Fourteenth street. I'll have her carry a red rose in her hand so you will know her, for she will be veiled."

"Good looker?"

"Yes, and a good dresser."

"Nice gal?"

"Oh, yes, first-class. If you say so, I will have her there, and she will go with you. But if she won't lift her veil in the theater, that's no business of mine," he added.

"All right, b'gosh, I'll du it," said he, with sudden earnestness. "I'll show 'em whether I can git a gal or not. Say, Dick, I'll pay her way into the theater, an' buy her a plate of ice-cream arter it's out," he added.

"That's the proper caper. I'll send Muff right over and tell her all about it. She's crazy to go to theaters, but awful particular about who she goes with. She may take a notion to you and throw up her veil. I don't know, and you mustn't blame me if she don't."

"That's all right, b'gosh. When I can't work my points with a gal, let me die."

"Well, shall I send for her?"

"Yes, of course."

"Quarter to eight; corner of Fourth avenue and Fourteenth street, eh?"

"I'll be thar, Dick; sure pop."

"Don't say a word to the colonel about it, for he's afraid you'll get led off."

"All right," and they separated.

Africanus Muff had been overhearing this little dialogue, and, as usual, he was ready to explode with laughter.

But they had an understanding, and Muff went to carry out his part of the business.

"Well, how are you getting along?" asked Colonel Suckerbait, meeting Josh soon after.

"Oh, fust-rate. Been all over town."

"What are you going to take in to-night?"

"Star Theater."

"That's good 'nough, an' I'm Mr. Joshua. Hook right on, Sarah," he added, offering his arm.

"Thank you," she said, taking it, and she was so trim and had such a sweet voice that Josh began to get interested in her.

"Gosh, this is like the readin' in story papers," thought he as they walked towards the theater. "But I'll bet I make her raise that veil before I leave her to-night. Ice-cream 'll raise it."

In the theater he tried his best to get her to raise her veil, but she would not.

Nevertheless, she was a good companion, and appeared greatly interested in the play, commenting upon it in a very intelligent manner, showing a good use of language and much common sense.

This was all very well, but Josh fancied that she

displayed a black skin and a pair of large white eyes. Josh leaped to his feet, spoon in hand.

"Thunder upon a gum-tree!" he exclaimed; and all eyes were directed towards him.

"I thought you didn't care—that you knew all about it," said she.

"Great hickory—a nigger wench!" and making a break, he cleared the room with two bounds and a hurried skip.

Everybody jumped up, including the subject of the excitement, who, however, was not long in following her escort.

But Mand S. would never have caught Josh at the rate he was going, and scooting down Thirteenth street towards University Place, he never slackened



They yanked him, pulling off his wig and a good portion of his ballet-dancer's dress, and touched him up with their clubs, and took him before the police captain.

"Well, that's good. Want to see you in the morning to show you our route. Got dates all filled for the next two months, and we shall do a rushing business. Come and see the rehearsal of the piece tomorrow at eleven. It is working like comical clock-work," and, shaking his hand, he hurried away.

"He's a goshdarned nice man: chuck 'll of business. Wish I could manage ter shin up to Angella," he mused. "Wal, maybe she'll be sorter jealous if she hears as how I've been with some other gal. They say that fetches gals to time quicker'n anything else," he muttered, and walked in the direction of a barber's shop.

That barber fixed him up, to the queen's taste, and with the fancy touches he had received he scarcely knew himself, and perhaps it was just as well that he did not.

He was all impatience until the time appointed, having bought two of the best orchestra seats in the house. They were away down front, for he wanted people to understand that he could get lady company if he wanted it.

Prompt to the moment, he went to the appointed place of meeting, and there saw standing a trim, well-dressed female, holding in her hand the agreed upon red, red rose, but veiled.

"Wal, good-evening," said he, approaching her, "I sorter 'spect you're waitin' for me."

"I was to meet a gentleman here who was to escort me to the theater."

"That's me, b'gosh."

"It is rather a strange way of meeting, and I don't exactly like the style of going veiled. But we will not discuss the matter now."

"That's all right—er—er—what's yure name?"

"Miss Sarah, please."

was more than ordinarily beautiful; and as he recognized several acquaintances there, and among them Angella Vandevere, occupying a private box, he was anxious to show her off, and besides, she was attracting considerable attention because of wearing that veil during the whole performance.

"She don't want them gals to see who she is," thought Josh; "but when I get her in the ice-cream saloon, she won't hold back, I guess."

He saw several whom he knew, but he did not recognize Dick Dingle and two or three others who were taking him in. In fact, he was beginning to think that he would eventually have to be very much obliged to Dick for introducing him to such a magnificent creature.

But the play was finally over, and he escorted his companion to a first-class ice-cream and confectionery store on Broadway, near the theater, where he usnored her into a prominent seat at one of the marble tables.

"Strawberry, please," said she, in a strawberry voice, to the young lady who waited on the table; and not knowing much about cream flavors, he concluded to make sure by ordering some of the same.

The flavored and sweetened ice was soon placed before them.

The young creature hesitated.

"Lift your veil and sail right in, Sarah," said he, seizing a spoon and setting the example.

"Well, of course you understand it," she finally said, looking at him.

"In course I do. It's all right. Go ahead."

"But the people here?"

"Oh, hang the people!"

"And you don't care?"

"Not a snap! Guess we're as good as they be."

"Very well," said she, and raising her blue veil,

his speed until he came to a dark spot up a narrow alleyway.

"Sarah!" was puzzled, thinking, as he admitted, that he "knew all about it," and so she just concluded that Africanus Muff had deceived her in the matter, and so just struck a gait for the darkened but classic precincts of Thompson street "real mad."

"Gosh all jewhitiker!" panted Joshua, in his hiding-place, "I wonder what'll happen me next? A nigger wench! Wal, that takes ther durned rag clean off the bush—it does, b'gosh! Wonder where the darned critter's gone? Hope she arn't hunting for me. Confound that Dick Dingle, I'll just take him by the heels an' rip him in tu. I will, b'gosh! Wonder if she's gone?" and he peeped cautiously out, so as to get a look up the street.

Seeing nothing suspicious, he continued his way around the block cautiously, and in order to cool off and reflect, he went over and took a seat in the park.

By this time he was mad all over. The idea of such a trick being played on him, and another laugh set a-going at his expense, was more than he could be reconciled to.

There was only one way to get revenge—and that was a poor one—thrashing Dick Dingle. And even that would not stop the laugh.

He dare not complain to Suckerbait, for he had warned him against the artful joker, and so he scarcely knew what to do.

Finally, after an hour or so, he started for his hotel, resolved to sleep on it.

But almost the first person he met in the hotel office was the self-same Dick Dingle, and two or three of his friends.

"Ah, there! catch on?" he asked, cheerfully.

"Goldarn your pelt! I'd like tu catch on tu yu 'bout a little while," said Josh, savagely.

"Why, what have I done?"

"What sort of a gal was that yu got me?"

"Nice girl. Why, what's the matter with her?"

"Nuthin', only she's a nigger wench, by thunder as 'lightnin'."

Everybody but Dick and Josh laughed.

"Why, confound that fellow, Muff, it is all his fault. I told him to find the best girl he knew for you, and probably this was his best girl. He didn't know who was going with her. So you see, my dear sir, that it was all a mistake. Too bad," he added.

"Tu bad! Wal, if yu ever get a chance tu play a joke like that on me agin, I'll swaller my butes—I will, b'gosh!"

"I am very sorry, my dear sir, but please don't say anything about it to the colonel, will you?" he asked, aside to him.

"No, goldarn yu, I'd be ashamed tu."

"Well, come in and have some cider," said Dick, leading the way into the bar-room.

"Wal, maybe yu think cider'll wash this thing out, but it won't," he growled.

"But it will wash it down. Come on and let us have a bottle," said he, coaxingly.

Joshua Sheepshank felt a great deal more like fighting than he did like drinking, but, with a little coaxing, he concluded to drink, and so a bottle of Extra Dry was opened.

"That's nice cider, b'gosh!" said he, smacking his lips while his glass was being refilled. "Darn sight sicker'n we have in Vermont."

"Oh, yes; best in the world like everything you get in New York," replied Dick, who took pains to keep him drinking it until he began to whoop.

"I'm Joshua Sheepshank, from Vermont, an' I don't care who knows it, b'gosh!" he cried, swinging his bat, and making himself generally too loud for the place.

But just then a big fire-cracker exploded at his feet, and turning an involuntary but complete flip-flop, he crawled under the table, and everybody rushed laughing from the place.

CHAPTER IV.

A COUPLE of waiters pulled Joshua Sheepshank out from under the table, where he had taken such sudden refuge when the big fire-cracker exploded at his feet in the hotel.

"Come, now, we've had enough of this," said the landlord.

"So 've I, b'gosh. What busted?" he asked, looking wildly around.

"It was nothing but a fire-cracker."

"By thunder! I thort it wur a biler. Wal, b'gosh, this 'ere has been an alfred lively night for me. Guess I'll go tu bed."

"That's the best thing you can do just now; but the best thing you can do *all* the time is to hire a guardian, to keep you out of the hands of the practical jokers around here. They'll be the death of you yet, if you don't."

"Guess I'll go tu bed," he mused, and one of the attendants steered him up-stairs to his room.

The next morning, when he awoke, he didn't want any more of that "cider." He wanted water, and swallowed about a quart of it without stopping, after which he swore-off, especially so far as having anything to do with Dick Dingle was concerned.

At eleven o'clock he went to the rehearsal for the first time; but never having seen anything of the kind before, he could of course make neither head nor tail of it.

Col. Suckerbait met him at the entrance.

"Ah, there! How are you feeling this morning?" was his first cheery question.

"Wal, b'gosh, I don't feel very kittenish," replied Joshua, sadly.

"Too many 'ciders'?"

"Wal—" and he hesitated.

The truth was, he didn't want to tell all he knew and felt, for the colonel had warned him against Dick, and against being a sucker generally, and so the question ended in a laugh.

"All right. We are just about to begin our rehearsal, and you can get an idea of what we are going to have to offer the public for their money. By the way, draw me a check for five hundred. Got a big printing bill to pay," he added.

Josh looked at him a moment, but the colonel had such an earnest, brisk, business-like way with him that it could but be all right, he thought, and so, taking his check-book from his pocket, he filled it out for the amount.

"There yu are," he said.

"Yes, that's all right. Just write on the stub of the check what the amount is drawn for, so that there may be no misunderstanding. I am thorough in my business, dear boy. Nothing like it. Figures never lie, and so don't forget to keep them with you."

"Wal, if this thing goes on much longer, I'll have all ther figners an' yu'll have all ther money," replied Josh, somewhat ruefully.

"Ah, dear boy, this is only an investment for future profits. We are now throwing our bread upon the waters, so to speak, and in a short time it will return to us all buttered. Wait until you see the money pouring into the box-office like a recompensating flood, and you will almost forget this trifling outlay. It's all right. Here, Dick!" he called, as he caught a glimpse of that youth, "show Mr. Sheepshank into the orchestra, where he will have a good view of the stage."

"All right. Come this way," said Dick, briskly.

"Goldarn yu're pictur," said Josh, glaring at him and hesitating to follow.

"Right this way."

He turned as though to denounce the youthful joker to Suckerbait, but he had gone; so he slowly followed Dick into the darkened theater.

Of course Dick piloted him in the most roundabout way, and of course he tumbled over several obstructions before reaching the right seat.

"Goshdarndest place I ever got into!" he growled. "Oh, well, that's because it is dark and you are not used to it," replied Dick.

"Don't see how anybody could get used tu it!"

"All clear enough when it's lighted up."

"But say! How about last night?" asked Sheepshank, turning to him; but had it not been dark where they were, Dick's look would still have been an honest one.

"What—in the hotel?" he asked.

"Yes, goldarn it!"

"Well, what did you fire your gun for?"

"I didn't fire no gun," said he, innocently.

"Why, I thought you did, and that's what made me skip out. Wonder who did fire it?"

"Goldarned if I know, but it eenemost scared me tu death."

"Well, it frightened me, too. Guess it must have been out in the street."

"I sorter guess as how it war some trick, or that yu know somethin' 'bout it, Dick."

"Me? You're dead wrong, Mr. Sheepshank. I was standing there when I heard the shot, and not knowing what might follow, I lit out."

"But how 'bout that nigger wench?"

"Oh, I explained that to yu. It was all Muff's fault. He thought I wanted the handsomest girl he knew, and being dead stuck on his own best girl, he trotted her out. But that's all right; nobody will ever know anything about it."

"I don't know 'bout that, b'gosh," said Josh.

"Why?"

"Wal, I saw Angellia there."

"Oh, well. She didn't notice you."

"Du yu think so, Dick?"

"I'm sure of it, for if she had, she'd have said something about it. Ah! there she is," he added, pointing to the dimly-lighted stage, where the company was assembled for rehearsal.

"B'gosh, she's as purty as ever. Can't I get a chance tu tork with her?"

"Yes, presently. You wait here, and, after she gets through with her part, I'll take you onto the stage, where you can see them all," replied Dick, turning and leaving him alone.

"Goldarn my aunt's heifer, if that 'ere gal arn't purtier'n a stick of candy. I must make love tu her or bust. Wonder if she'll have me?" he muttered, and then settled into his seat to see what was going on.

"Act first—scene first!" shouted Suckerbait. "Clear the stage, please."

Then followed a jumble of words, actions, orders and directions for stage business that were perfectly bewildering to the countryman, and, indeed, they would have been to anybody but an actor.

Of course, as before stated, he could make neither head nor tail of it, and, after watching and listening for an hour or more, he began to think it about the worst play he had yet seen.

True, there were speeches and songs, and any quantity of coming on and going off, but it didn't seem a bit like a play to him, and if that was what they were going to startle and draw crowded houses with, he concluded that there would be nothing but figures left to represent his ten thousand dollars.

Indeed, he felt blue and like inquiring into the thing before it went any further.

There was only one bright speck in the whole business, and that was Miss Angellia, with her sweet voice, sitting on and off the stage, and if she had had the whole thing to do, he would have been much better satisfied.

Finally, in the last act, the plot of the play brought her into trouble of some sort, and then she was rescued.

She wept, and a man was telling her of what dreadful things he would do if she did not consent to marry somebody or other.

This interested Joshua right off.

It was altogether too personal for his liking, and the way he looked at it was that this affair was altogether outside of the play.

"Oh, spare me—spare me!" she cried; "I love another!"

Josh didn't know but she referred to him.

"I will not spare you! You are in my power, and if you do not comply, I will crush you!" the villain of the piece replied, fiercely.

"Here, yu, stop that!" roared Josh, unable longer to restrain himself. "Yu won't crush nobody, unless it's me. I'll stick up for that gal, b'gosh!"

It was so dark in the auditorium that he was scarcely visible, but, naturally enough, those on and off the stage turned to see who the interloper was.

"Oh, I mean it, b'gosh, an' if yu don't let that gal alone thar'll be trouble!"

At this they recognized him, and of course there was a loud laugh from the actors.

Suckerbait stepped to the front.

"That's all right, Josh, it's only a part of the play," said he, but that of course did not stop the laughter.

"Oh, it is, hey?" said Josh, sitting down and looking very sheepish. "I thort as how thar war trouble."

"Oh, no, that's all right," replied the colonel, and then the scene was continued.

Finally the rehearsal was over, and while Suckerbait was explaining some "business" to the company, Dick Dingle conducted Sheepshank behind the scenes for the first time.

It was the opening of a new chapter in life to him.

Until now the stage seemed a whole world to him, out of which came men and women to enact their parts as though nobody were looking.

But to see how narrow and confined it was, how dark and unnatural—what daubs the beautiful scenes really were, he could scarcely believe his eyes.

Miss Angellia was engaged just then, and so Dick volunteered to show him through the mysteries of the stage, promising to bring him to his divinity by the time she was at liberty.

He took him up into the "flies," and honestly explained the mysteries to him.

He took him everywhere, and explained many things in a queer sort of a way, although Josh swallowed it all for gospel.

And among other things he took him down under the stage where the carpenters were at work, and explained some of the curious mechanism to him.

"Wal, I'll be goldarned if I'd er' believed it," he would exclaim every now and then.

"Oh, it's all very simple when you come to get acquainted with it," said Dick.

"Yes, I s'pose so. What's that 'ere contrivance?" he asked, pointing to a "vampire trap."

"That's a trap."

"A trap? What for tu catch?"

"Oh, we don't catch anything in it. It is used to take folks up on the stage."

"Oh, like one of them tavern elevators, as they call 'em," said Josh.

"Exactly. Like to go up?"

"Up where Miss Angellia is?"

"Yes, right up where is."

"Yes, b'gosh. Hist me," said he, earnestly.

"All right. Step right on here," replied Dick, winking to the carpenter, who was in with him and who was to help work the "vampire."

"B'gosh, I guess she'll think I'm findin' out all about theaters purty quick," said he, stepping upon the "carrier," or platform.

"Are you all ready?"

"Yes; let her hist!"

Dick and the carpenter *did* "let her hist," and the next instant Sheepshank shot up through that stage like a jack-in-a-box.

Not only did he go up through it, but not being used to it, he went several feet above it, and came down all sprawling.

The ladies screamed, and the men started back in alarm.

Sheepshank was so thoroughly broken up that no one recognized him.

If one had been suddenly shot up from the grave, the effect would have been no more startling than this one was.

Colonel Suckerbait cautiously approached, and looked at him through his glasses.

"Why—why, Sheepshank, is it you?" he finally asked.

"Is it me?" he ventured to ask, through his chattering teeth, and then he glared wildly around him.

"Yes; is it you?"

"Wal, I'll be goldarned if I know!" he replied, pulling himself together the best he could, and while Suckerbait was assisting him to rise.

"Where in the name of goodness did you come from?"

"Down below, I reckon," he sighed, at the same time rubbing his bruises.

"Well, I should certainly think so."

"Goldarn such an elevator as that is!" he muttered, glancing around, as if to see where he had come from.

But the trap had been closed as suddenly as it was opened, and there remained nothing to show him where it was.

The company gathered around, laughing, but Josh saw nothing to laugh at.

On the other hand, he thought swearing would be more appropriate.

"What is the matter?" asked Suckerbait.

"Matter! I feel as though I had been kicked sky-high by a mule," said he, looking down at him.

"But how did it happen?"

"What, the mule?"

"No; how did you happen to shoot up through that vampire trap?"

"Trap! Wal, b'gosh, I don't know kersactly. I war down-stairs with Dick, who war showin' me the sights, an' when I asked him what somethin' war, he said it war what yu call a trap, somethin' like an elevator, sich as they have in these New York taverns."

"Hotels, you mean," suggested the colonel.

"Wal, he asked me if wanted tu ride up-stairs on it, an' I said yes."

"Oh, you did, eh?" and they all roared.

"Yes, an' I got on tu the consarned old contrivance."

"Exactly, and you got off, too."

"Wal, I rather reckon yes," said he, and the entire company roared again.

"Thought you was playing in a pantomime, eh?" asked the colonel.

"Pantomime! B'gosh, I thort I wor a-playin' leap-frog with ther Green Mountains up in Vermont. What is ther darned thing?" he asked, looking around for it.

"Oh, it is all closed up now."

"Gone out of business?"

"Yes, for the present, or until some other fresh rooster concludes to try it."

"Oh, yu keep it for greenhorns, hey?"

"No, it is made for actors, but when a fellow comes along who is green enough to want to try it, he generally gets served just as you have been served."

"Yu don't say so?"

"Fact, I assure you."

"Ever see it work that way afore?"

"Never. But how many times have I got to tell you to look out for that Dick Dingle? He will kill

you yet," said Suckerbait. "Here, Dick," he called, having spied the young rascal at one of the wings. "If you don't stop playing your pranks, I'll give your part in the piece to somebody else, and you shall not go along."

"Well, it was his own fault. He wanted to know what the trap was for, and I told him it was to hoist people upon the stage. He got on, and wanted to try it—that's all."

"I guess he didn't want to try it half so bad as you did. Now mind what I told you; I'll have no more of this nonsense."

"No, b'gosh!" added Sheepshank.

"Didn't you say you wanted to surprise Miss Angella?" asked Dick.

"Why, the one I saw you with at the theater last night."

This fairly choked him, for he had hoped that she had not seen him, or if she did, that she did not know the truth of the matter.

"Oh, you awful dirt!" she added.

"No, I am't."

"But why did she keep her veil down all through the performance?"

"Wal—"

This broke him all up.

He looked at her, and not only she, but the other lady members of the company, laughed heartily at him.

This fractured his spine, so to speak.

"Alas, never more!" sighed Miss Montrose, with strong stage effect.

"Girls, what's ther matter?" asked Josh, looking from one to the other.

"I—I was jealous, Mr. Sheepshank, and I—I followed you," said Angella, hysterically.

"Followed me?" gasped Josh.

"Yes, over to the ice-cream saloon. I—I saw you order the cream; I—I saw her lift her veil, and—"

"Gosh all hemlock!" exclaimed Joshua, making a rush for the stage door, followed by a shout of laughter which rang in his ears for a week afterwards.

CHAPTER V.

DURING the next few days Joshua Sheepshank



"Are you all ready?" "Yes; let her hist!" Dick and the carpenter did "let her hist," and the next instant Sheepshank shot up through that stage like a jack-in-a-box.

"Wal, I guess I *did*, didn't I?" asked Josh, turning to her.

"Indeed you did, Mr. Sheepshank. I was never so surprised in my life," said she, laughing merrily, and then the entire company began to chaff him on the rapid progress he was making in getting acquainted with the mysteries and intricacies of the stage.

"Wal, b'gosh, yu don't catch me more'n once at that game," said he, and then he began to slide up to Miss Angella. "Kinder sudden like, wasn't it?"

"Well, I should say so. You seem to be having lots of trouble, Mr. Sheepshank."

"Wal, in ther first place, I thort as how that chap war tryin' tu impose on yu, that's what made me kick up."

"You are very chivalrous, sir," said she, bowing, with a little stage laugh.

"B'gosh, I d' know what that is, but I'm clean grit when anybody hurts ther feelins of anybody I like, specially a darned nice gal."

"It must be so."

"An' ther only reason I got histed on that confounded trap war 'cos Dick said as how it would take me right up tu yu."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, I'm just peaches an' cream on yu," said he, poking his finger at her.

"On me?"

"Yes. B'gosh, I'd fight an army of wild cats for yu."

"Oh, you are joking, Mr. Sheepshank."

"No, b'gosh, I mean it."

"Tut, tut!" said she, tapping him playfully with her fan.

This made him fairly snort.

"How about that other lady?"

"What other lady?"

"How about it?" asked Miss Kutejack.

"Yes, tell us all about it," added Miss Montrose, pulling him by the arm.

"Oh, yu git out," said he, trying to laugh.

Suckerbait and the male members of his company were watching and listening, for they had heard all about the sell, but at the same time allowed the ladies to do the chaffing.

"Was she so beautiful that you did not dare to let her expose her features?"

"Now, yu git out."

"Do you know, Mr. Sheepshank, I was just as jealous as I could be," said Miss Vandevere, pouting real pretty.

"No: *wus* yur, though?" asked Josh.

"To be sure I was."

"Of course she was," added Miss Kutejack.

"Wal, now, I—"

"Oh, that's all right. You pretend to love me, and yet take somebody else to the theater."

"Wal, yu wouldn't go with me."

"How do you know I wouldn't?"

"Didn't I ask yu?"

"Oh, well, you didn't do it strong enough—you didn't coax me."

"B'gosh, that's what's ther matter, eh?" he asked, laughing loudly.

"Why, of course," put in Miss Montrose. "Don't you know that we girls love to be coaxed?"

"Wal, now, I'm sorter gettin' used tu this thing. I'll know how next time."

"Ah, but it is too late now, Mr. Sheepshank," said Angella, turning away.

"Yes, too late," sighed Miss Kutejack.

"Tu late! What for?"

"It can never, never be."

"What can't?"

did not make himself very conspicuous around where the members of the company were, more especially the ladies thereof.

But it was a slow process for him to ripen, in spite of all the advice that his partner, Colonel Suckerbait, could give him.

He tried to brace up and follow instructions, but mischievous Dick Dingle would get in his fine work on him every now and then.

But the members of that combination, whose salaries he was paying, knew which side their bread was buttered on too well to carry their jokes too far; and so, after a while, he got on sober terms with them again, they taking his part against the snaps which had been played on him, although not condemning Dick Dingle too directly.

"Oh, that is all right," said Dunellen, the leading man, one day. "Every person is liable to have jokes played on him in our profession, until he gets his pipe colored."

"Pipe colored! I don't smoke," replied Josh, innocently.

"I don't mean that. I mean until you get a little fly."

"Get a little fly! What in thunder du I want of a little fly?"

"Oh, you don't catch my meaning."

"No, nor I don't catch flies nuther."

"Of course not. What I mean is, that this annoyance will cease just as soon as you take a tumble," said Dunellen, seriously.

"Now, b'gosh, what sort of tork du yu call that? What in thunder du I want tu tumble for?" he asked, impatiently.

"Well, not *literally* a tumble, but you want to drop on the snaps."

"Du yu mean Dutch gin?"

"No—no; their little games. Get posted on the legs of the fakirs, and then they'll hold up their hands. See?"

"Oh, yes, I see; that is, I guess I do; but I'll be goldarned if I understand what you're drivin' at, an' I guess you don't," replied Josh.

"Oh, well, what you want is to get posted on the ways of the world. See that?"

"Yes; now you talk."

"Keep your eyes skinned, and mind what you nibble at. Catch on?"

"Yes."

"Connect with good fogs, and take no notice of guff. See?"

"Wal, yes. Guess I see as much as I ever shall torkin' to you," said he, walking away.

"Well, isn't he a Jay? I don't think he will ever tumble until a big pile of bricks falls on him. But it will never do to go back on him until the colonel catches on, which I don't think will be very soon, if I may judge from the play he has written. I hope he won't get very far from home, for I don't think that ten thousand will last very long, and I don't like this walking back to town for any long distance. Mum is the word, though, and every penny saved. I have lately discovered that it is cheaper to buy paper collars and cuffs than it is to get regular ones washed. Therefore, I shall lay in a good stock of them, so that I may laugh at laundries. Wonder if I shall ever get money enough ahead to marry Angella?" and thus musing, he sauntered away.

By this time, however, the rehearsals were nearly finished and preparations in a forward state for starting out on the road with Colonel Suckerbait's Great Combination.

And his dramatic lyceum, as he called it: his dramatic agency, on Union Square, was a scene of much activity, and Joshua Sheepshank was doing his best to get acquainted with the business, although about all he did was to pay the rapidly accumulating bills, and do his best to make himself solid with the star, Miss Angella Vandevere.

He had succeeded so far in this that she had accepted a handsome watch and chain from him, and was even then dallying with the prospect of getting a new hat and a box of gloves in return for some artistic coquetry on her part.

The story of his involuntary escapade at the theater with a veiled colored girl was gradually being forgotten, because it had really been laughed almost out of existence, and Joshua seemed to stand very well with the charming actress.

Indeed, she had gone to the theater with him once or twice, but when he attempted to make love to her, she had turned him artfully off by explaining the play and the business of it to him. In fact, she was honestly trying to make something of him for the business he was engaged in.

But Josh didn't care a snap for business. He was dead stuck on her, and would undoubtedly have given up all his capital to Suckerbait, and let him do what he liked with it, provided she would have consented to marry him—a thing she had no more notion of doing than of flying.

It was understood, however, between herself and Colonel Suckerbait, that she was to keep him on a string as long as his money lasted, for he saw plainly enough that the fellow had no capacity or heart in the business further than related to her, and if she gave him the cold shoulder he would probably kick, and break up the magnificent scheme.

For Suckerbait, with all his dishonesty and wild ideas, certainly believed that this venture that he had sought for so long would make a rich man of him, and so he worked every card to keep Joshua in the harness until such time as he became independent of everything but his own exertions.

Thus matters stood after everything was nearly ready for a start upon the road.

One morning Sheepshank and the company were to assemble at Suckerbait's office for the purpose of seeing the specimens of lithographic printing that he had prepared.

Josh was the first to arrive, and found the office in the possession of Africanus Muff, the boss bill-poster, as he styled himself, and a more delighted and enthusiastic coon was never seen, for not only was he to be taken along with the combination as the bill-poster-in-chief, but he had a part in the play—the part of a colored servant with scarcely anything to say.

"Good-mo'nin', Mr. Muttonshanks," said he, saluting the moneyed partner with a profound bow.

"Who in thunder told you to call me Muttonshanks?" roared Josh.

"I begs pardon, sah; I means Lambshanks."

"You lie, you black rascal! My name is Joshua Sheepshank, and if I ever hear tell of you're callin' me anything else, I'll shoot you!"

"So you may, sah. It wur a mistake, sah. I orter hab known better, but I was sorter 'cited, an' come de nearest to it dat I could."

"Wal, I don't like niggers nohow. Whar's the colonel?" he asked, looking around.

"He hab not arrive, sah."

"Wal, what are you doin' here?"

"Waitin' fo' Dick and de boss. Do you cast you eye on dem show-bills?" he asked, pointing to the brilliant combinations of color that hung on the walls of the office.

Josh looked around.

It was indeed a liberal display of the printers' and lithographers' art.

There was a flattering life-size portrait of the gallant Colonel Suckerbait; two full length of the beautiful and "famous" star, Miss Angella Vandevere, together with four sheet scenes from the play of "The Chump's Bride," together with large and small type enough to start a printery.

All of which Josh had paid for.

But he didn't stop to see whether his own name appeared as one of the proprietors of this big combination—his gaze was mostly fastened upon the artistic exaggerations of Miss Vandevere.

They were in reality more beautiful than she was herself, but not to his thinking, and he sighed for the time to come when he could send one of those beautiful full-length portraits home to the old folks, and inform them that she was to be their daughter-in-law.

In his correspondence with his parents relative to how he was getting on, he caught Suckerbait's enthusiasm, and wrote most glowing accounts of his future prospects, although they, and also the girl who was in love with him up there in his native place, took but little stock in it.

Indeed, this sweet country girl, Dolly Dimple, who considered herself as good as engaged to him when he was taken with the crazy notion of going to New York and becoming a Jay Gould, made up her mind to follow him, to see that he did not tumble into temptation.

"Wal, now, that's purty goshdarned nice," said he, after looking at the bills a few minutes.

"Nice, boss! I's an expert in dis yer business, an' I tole yer dat it's de finest ink-work on de road," said Muff, with enthusiasm.

"B'gosh, I guess it is. When be you goin' to stick 'em up over town?"

"Over de town?"

"Yes."

"Why, we's gwine to try it on de dog fust."

"Try it on ther dorg? What dorg?" asked Josh, in wonder.

"Why, don't you know what dat means?"

"No; I'll be hanged if I du."

"Wal, you see, when a manager hab a new play dat he am not shuah about how it will take, he plays it fust in some little town to see how it works. Dat am what we professionals call tryin' it on de dog."

"Wal, b'gosh, I should think it was. But how does ther dorg like it, generally speakin'?"

"Oh, sometimes he take it in whole, an' mo' times he spit it out," replied Muff, laughing.

"What dorg is he goin' to try it on fust?"

"De Newark dog. Ya, ya, ya! Dey mos' allus try it on de Newark dog fust off," and he showed his ivories in a big laugh.

"Do you think it will take?"

"Oh, shuah! Look at dat printin'! Dat will fill de house, no matter what de play am."

At that moment Colonel Suckerbait came bustling into the office, big with enthusiasm and the business before him.

"Ah, there, dear boy! How is that, eh?" he asked, waving his hand towards the posters. "Won't that catch 'em? Why, dear boy, that show of ink will fill any theater in the world."

"Wal, I hope it will," replied Josh.

"Not the slightest doubt of it, dear boy. We will just paralyze Newark. Here, Muff, you want to get right off to business now. I have engaged the Opera House for three nights, and you want to paint the town in flaming colors with these bills."

"Yes, sah; I's de chile can do it."

"Well, see that you do. We open there next Monday night, and the place must be thoroughly billed. Come, now, hurry off, and I will be out there this afternoon to see how you get on."

"Yes, sah," and he vanished.

"Now, then, when we get ready to let ourselves out, we will lock up this office, and let it take care of itself while we barrel the money. Ah, good-morning, my stellar queen," he added, as Miss Angella Vandevere glided into the room.

"Good-morning," she said, bowing to both of them.

"Cast your lustrous eyes over this array of ink, and see if we are not starrin' your name as per agreement," said the colonel, triumphantly.

"Splendid!" she exclaimed, feasting her eyes upon the superb representation of herself.

"Won't that catch 'em?"

"Well, I should say so. What do you think o' them, Mr. Sheepshank?" turning to him with an incandescent smile.

"All purty nice; but I don't think that picter is half so good-lookin' as you be," said he, feasting his eyes upon her face.

"Oh, your horrid flatterer!"

"No, I arn't, b'gosh! I mean it."

"I guess he isn't far from right, Miss Angella. At all events, he will think so when he sees you made up for the part of *Clarinda*," said Suckerbait.

"Wal, b'gosh, I hope she won't look any more purtier than she does now," replied Josh.

"Why not?" asked Suckerbait.

"Because somebody'll steal her, sure."

"Well, I wish somebody would steal me."

"You du!" exclaimed Josh, open-eyed.

"Yes. It would be a first-class advertisement—eh, colonel?"

"Indeed it would. The papers would be full of it, and we should get piles of free advertising."

"Let's work the racket," said she.

"We'll see after a while."

"What, an' you be stolen?" asked Josh.

"Yes, but only in fun, you know. Some stars have their diamonds or their poodles stolen, but it would be seeing their snap and going them several better to have the star stolen. See?"

"No, I'll be goshdarned if I du."

"Think of the advertising."

"An' you kidnapped?"

"Yes, put up a job and have some men abduct me. Wouldn't that be a big scheme?" she asked, with much animation.

"No, I don't like it," said he, sulkily.

"Why not, pray?" she asked, winking to Suckerbait, who was busy at his desk, or at least pretending to be.

"Wal, you orter know by this time that I think a darned sight tu much of you to let anybody else come ulin' round you."

"But only in fun, you know."

"Fun or earnest, I don't care a darn which, I'm agin it, b'gosh."

"But business is business, you know," she said, continuing to tease him.

Josh shook his head deprecatingly.

"Now, look here, Joshua," said she, taking hold of his arm, and looking into his face with a gaze that thrilled his marrow.

"I'm lookin'," said he, grinning.

"See how nice we could plan it. After we have been on the road awhile, say when we get out West somewhere, we can have it arranged that while I am out walking some day, in some lonely spot, two burly ruffians should overtake me in a carriage, spring out, seize me, hurry me into the vehicle, and drive off with me, while my screams attract the attention of somebody, who gives chase, but is unable to overtake the carriage. In my struggles I manage to throw a glove or something from the carriage-window, which is picked up by the pursuers, and afterwards proven to be mine. The outrage comes to the ears of the police, who start in search, while the colonel works it up with the reporters, and in a short time the whole country will learn with astonishment that the beautiful leading lady of our great combination has been kidnapped in broad daylight. How is that?"

"Goldarned bosh," replied Josh.

"But think of the advertising."

"An' you in the hands of ruffians? Guess not."

"But only in fun."

"Fun or earnest, I don't like it. Let 'em try it on some other gal," said he, decidedly.

"But no harm will come to me, and I can make believe to escape after a day or two, and draw big houses to see me."

"It's all rot, Angella. It would make me blubber like a calf," said he, taking her hand and looking as though about to cry even then.

She laughed at him, called him a great goose, and so the matter dropped.

Other members of the company came in and admired the show-bills they were to sail under in the indefinite future, while Suckerbait was busy giving orders to this one and that, giving the place a great air of business and bustle.

Presently Dick Dingle came in and reported progress on trunks and baggage.

Expressmen had been gathering them up from the residences of the various members of the company, and depositing them in a temporary store room, from which they were all to be taken the next day to Newark, N. J.

"Oh, I am so anxious about my trunks, Mr. Sheepshank," said his innamorata, placing her hand upon his arm. "Won't you be kind enough to see to them?"

"You bet I will. I'll take good care of anything that b'longs to you, Angie," said he, earnestly.

"Oh, you are so kind. All my beautiful dresses are packed in them, so if you will go with Dick and see to them—will you?"

"Tu be sartin I will."

"Oh, you are a duck of a man!" and she tapped him with her fan, which made him feel as though he were being tickled by an electric battery.

That day and the following one were spent in getting ready for the great start, and Joshua Sheepshank was making himself useful in many ways, but especially in looking after the trunks and other belongings of Miss Angella.

Just before the big express wagon was ready to take the load of huge trunks over to Jersey City, he was at the room, in company with Dick Dingle and two or three porters, who were taking the luggage out on the sidewalk.

Josh discovered a big trunk that stood open and empty among the lot, and of course he wanted to know who it belonged to.

It was an old battered affair belonging to Colonel Suckerbait, and had seen some hard usage in many campaigns on the road, and Dick was not intending to take it at all.

"That belongs to Miss Vandevere," said he.

"Does it, though? B'gosh, it's big enough for a corn-barn," replied Josh.

"Yes, but I guess she forgot to pack it," and he went on giving orders to the porters, the wagon having arrived, and the trunks being loaded.

But there was a fascination about that old trunk for Josh. It belonged to his charmer, and that was enough for him. He would take it along, anyhow.

"B'gosh, it's big 'nough to carry a man in," he mused, and tempted by something or other, he got into it and curled himself up, just as though he were getting nearer its owner.

Dick Dingle was behind it with two porters, and quick as a flash he slammed down the cover that closed with two spring-locks, and the love-sick countryman was imprisoned.

The porters laughed, of course, and of course Sheepshank yelled.

"That's all right," said Dick. "We'll take him right along as he is. It'll save his fare. Take it right out and put it on the load."

Nothing loath, the two stout porters lifted the ark-like trunk, and hustled it out-of-doors and on to the wagon.

Sheepshank yelled and kicked, but once outside, the noise in the street drowned the feeble effort to make himself heard, and so away he was hustled with the load, going rattling and jouncing over the noisy street.

When all was ready, and the company were waiting to be taken in carriages to the ferry, Suckerbait became worried at the absence of his partner, but

Miss Vandevere laughed, and said he had most likely gone with her trunks.

This seemed natural enough under the circumstances, and so away they went without him.

In the meantime, poor Sheepshank was in more or less misery. The breath was nearly jolted out of him, and had it not been for a few cracks in the old trunk, he would have suffocated.

When the load arrived at the depot in Jersey City, his trunk, with the others, was bounced and hustled from the wagon into the baggage-car, and in the noise and confusion his cries and kicks were unnoticed.

He was stood on his head, then, rolled over on his back or face, and indeed, it seemed as though the baggage-smashers owed particular spite to this old

"Wal, b'gosh, I s'pose it's just my darned luck; but if I only knew the feller that slammed that trunk-cover down, I'd harness him."

"But how came you in the trunk, anyhow? Did anybody throw you in?" asked Suckerbait.

"Wal, no, I don't 'low fellers to fule with me that way."

"But how came you in there?"

"Wal, I sorter got into the thing to see if it war big 'nough to hold a man, an' somebody slammed the darned old cover down, an' I war hustled aboard the wagon with the other trunks," said he, sheepishly.

"Who did it?"

"Gosh-darned if I know. Dick an' two or three others war in the room."

"Here, Dick, where are you?"

"And do try and see if you can't keep away from Dick Dingle and from making a guy of yourself. You must remember that we are on the road now, and that the eyes of the world are upon us," said the colonel, aside to him.

"I'll be gosh-darned if I blame him," muttered Josh, as he headed for a clothing store near the depot, "for I 'du think I've been the darndest fule ever since I landed in York that ever was. I think I'll lick that Dick Dingle. It would du the pesky critter good. But it war all my own fault, only I'm so dead stuck on that Angie that I thort it would seem good to get into her trunk, gosh-darn it. Wonder what she thinks of me now? It'll take a week for her to get over her laughin' at me so as I can get another chance to make love to her agin. Rot blast the luck. I'm a fule an'



The station hands were alarmed, and finally the trunk was broken open to solve the mystery. Joshua Sheepshank struggled to his feet, the worst broken-up specimen of humanity that was ever seen.

trunk, and let themselves out for the purpose of smashing it.

Dick Dingle was superintending the loading and unloading, and in an hour the train bearing baggage and company arrived at Newark, where, another bouncing of trunks was indulged in by the baggage fiends.

Finally, Sheepshank's trunk was tumbled out, and Dick saw that it was placed right side up with care.

But when the train had left and the noise subsided, Josh began to make himself heard. The station hands were alarmed, and finally the trunk was broken open to solve the mystery.

Joshua Sheepshank struggled to his feet, the worst broken-up specimen of humanity that was ever seen.

CHAPTER VI.

"WHAT in blazes is this?" demanded the station-agent. "Stealing a ride, eh?"

"Stealin' thunder!" gasped Josh Sheepshank, crawling painfully out of the old trunk.

"But you'll have to pay, or I'll have you arrested. Who owns this baggage?" he asked, looking around.

"I do," said Colonel Suckerbait, approaching just as his partner emerged. "In the name of all that's good, what are you doing there?" he added, to Josh.

"You will have to pay his fare," put in the station-agent, again.

"Well, wait a moment, will you? How came you in that trunk, Josh?"

The countryman saw that he had put his foot in it again, and hardly knew what to say.

But he knew how foolish he felt.

"What is the meaning of this?" and several members of the company had gathered around then.

"He has 'gone up to the Opera House," said one member of the company.

"Confound that rascal!" muttered Suckerbait. "It is one of his tricks, I'll bet. But, Josh, you had no business to get into the trunk, anyhow, and lay yourself liable to be caught in such a snap. I never saw a person like you in my life."

"Wal, I guess you never did. But where's a glass of water, or something? I'm nearly dead."

"Well, you look it, and it's a great wonder that you wasn't killed entirely."

"But he must pay his fare all the same," put in the station-agent again.

"Oh, well, here it is," retorted Suckerbait, handing him the money. "and don't let us have any more chin-music about it."

"Well, you may think yourselves lucky in getting off so easily as that," replied the man, pocketing the coin for keeps.

Meantime, Sheepshank was trying to pull himself together and to explain the mishap to Miss Angelia and others.

But to make the best of it he could, he only got laughed at, the which he was sensible enough to know he deserved.

There could be no doubt but that it was one of Dick Douglas' tricks; but after admitting that he got into the trunk to gratify a foolish curiosity, there wasn't one of the company that blamed Dick for what he had done.

Indeed, Josh, although as mad as a pig in a rain-storm, could not blame him himself.

"Now, ladies, right this way, and I will show you to the hotel. And as for you, Josh, you had better hunt up a clothing store the first thing you do."

"Wal, b'gosh, I guess that's so," said he, looking at himself.

greener 'n garden sass, an' I'll never catch her in the world if I don't sorter pull myself together an' be cute, like these city chaps."

Musing thus, he stopped in front of a Hebrewized clothing-store, and began to look at the different articles of wear that were hung above and around him in tempting colors and prices.

A graduate of Chatham street saw him.

"Ah, mine tear frient, I see that your coot chudgment brings you to de right store. Walk right in, mine frient, and I vill mage your eyes vater mit styles und pargains," said he, seizing Josh by the arm and pulling him into his musty den.

Josh was meek, and looked about without speaking.

"Now vot shall I show you?"

"Wal, I reckon I want a new suit. This one is 'bout used up," said he.

"Dat vos all right, mine frient. I vill sell you a Fifth avenue suit of cloding for von half der brice, und dake your old clodes for bart payment. You vos a stranger in Newark?"

"Never see ther gol-darned town before."

"Oh, I vos sure of dot. I vos quick to recognize a New York chendlemen all der dime, und always keeps a special line of goots for them," said he, going for him with a tape measure.

Josh was slightly flattered, and concluded that he would allow the man that had so much interest in him to have his own way.

"How does dot strike you?" asked the Hebrew, pulling out the loudest kind of a suit, of a fashion worn on the Bowery ten or twelve years before.

"Wal, that's kinder purty," mused Josh.

"Und id is der very knob of der style. I bade dot fits you like baper on de vall."

"How much?"

"I sell you dot suit for dwenty-five tollar und your old suit, dot I gise away mit charidy."

"Twenty-five dollars?" exclaimed Josh.

"Not a cent less. How much you gise?"

"Wal, let's try it on fust, an' see if it fits."

"Certainly. Rebecca!" he called, looking towards the back end of the store, "get der children out of der bedroom, for I hafe a swell customer from New York. Come righd this vay," he presently added, leading Josh into a dark bedroom at the back of the establishment.

Here Josh with some difficulty got out of his old suit into the proposed new one, and came out into the front store to have a look at them in the semi-day-light.

"Ah, my tear ar, your swell friends in New York

"Oh, that's all right," said Josh, pulling out his money and paying for the clothes.

"Ah! vat a beautiful fit!" ejaculated the merchant, pocketing the money. "But one thing, mine friend, don't tell anybody bud your swell friends vare you buy dem clothes, for I don't vant to be bothered mit cheap beoples dot vants dot sort of goods."

"All right," replied Josh, taking another look at himself and going away.

The truthful and conscientious Hebrew gazed after him a moment as he walked up the street, and then, turning to his wife, Rebecca, he swung his hand above his head for a moment, while a smile hovered over his face.

"Rebecca, bring out dem old clothes. I bade you dot I sell dem for twendy-five tollar after you fix dem

This puzzled Sheepshank somewhat; but thinking at first that they were only laughing because he had suddenly come out in swell style, he whirled around and asked the colonel what he thought of him.

"What do I think of you? In the name of goodness, where did you connect with those togs?" asked the disgusted Suckerbait.

"Bought 'em," replied Josh, proudly.

"For heaven's sake, where?"

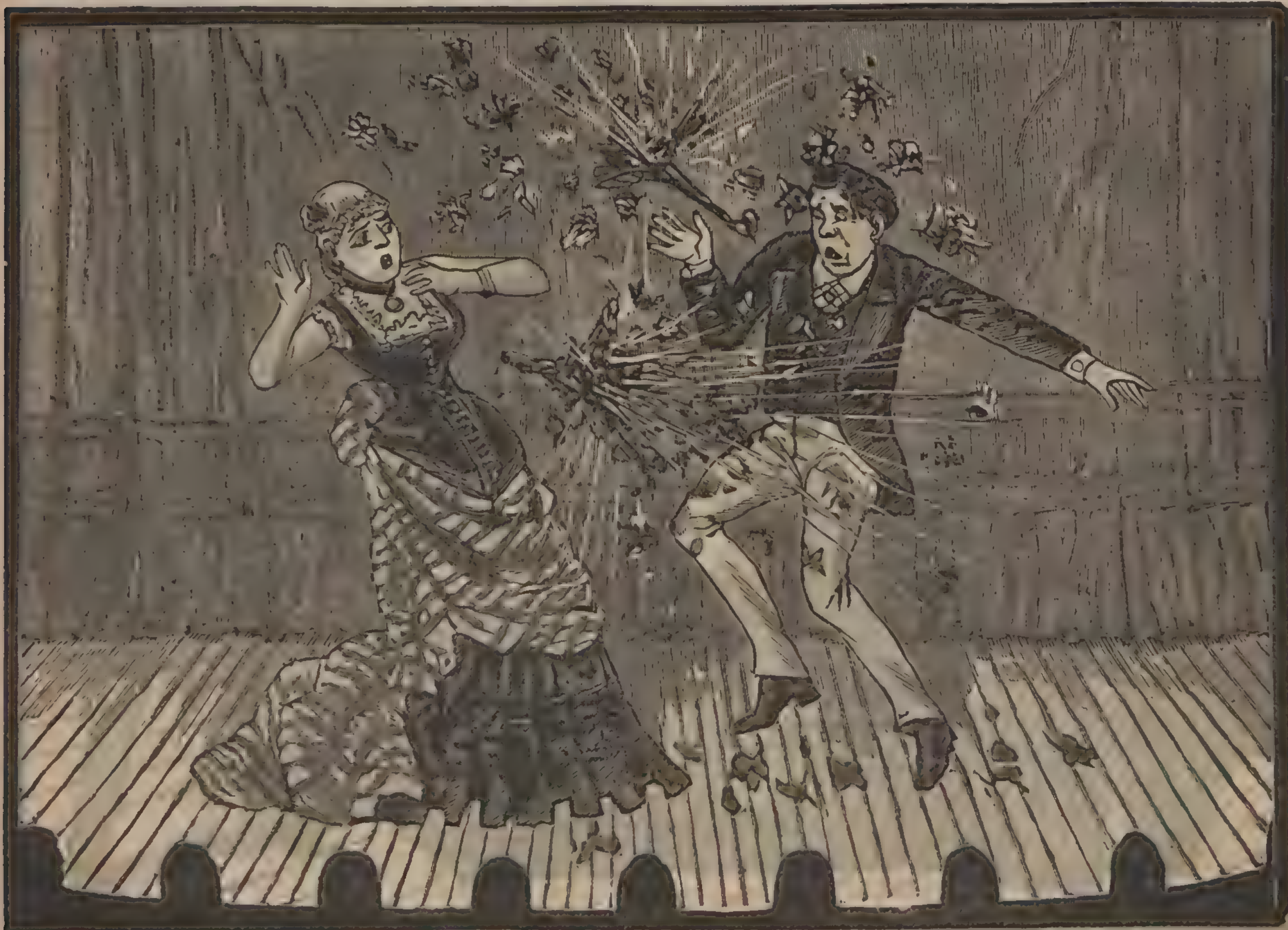
"Down here."

"Well, that takes the bun."

"Quite swell, eh?"

"I should shout that it was."

"Is that the latest, Josh?" asked Miss Vandevere, taking him by the arm and wheeling him around.



He took them up and bowed again, but while doing so a big fire-cracker exploded in each of them, shattering them, and frightening the life nearly out of him.

would recognize you ad vonce. Id fits you like the skin of a sausage," said the merchant, hitching it up here and there, and standing off for an admiring look.

"Are you sure this is the latest style?" asked Josh, looking at what he could of himself in a little cracked mirror.

"Ah, my tear sir, dot suit vos made py Chlm Pell for a customer of mine dot died chnst before he had time to try id on. Oh, id is a very nobby suit, und I knew dot I had a customer for id der moment I set eyes on you. Dot suit vill make der swells open der eyes mit envy," he added, with another admiring look.

Joshua thought of Angella Vandevere, and felt that he should make a point.

"Wal, I'll give you twenty dollars an' my old suit for it," he finally said.

"Oh, my tear sir, you vos foolin' mit me. Dot is not der vay mine swell customers talk to me. Only cheap beoples try to peat me down. Dot suit vos dirt-cheap at der brice, und would cost you von hundred tollar if you go to Chlm Pell, und den id would nod fit you so well. Twendy-five tollar."

"No, I think that's too much if I give you my other suit," said Josh, resolved on being just a little smart.

At this the Jew pretended to be much hurt.

"If id did not fit you so vell, und would reflect credit on my establishment, I would not sell id for forty tollar."

"I'll give you twenty."

"Vale," he said, with a deep sigh, "as you vos mine first customer to-day, I vill led you hafe id for dot, if you vill speak some good vords for me," said he.

He felt in high feather in spite of the bumps and bruises he had received on his journey, and was confident of making a hit not only with the appreciative colonel, but with the ladies as well.

He was encouraged in this by the notice he attracted on all sides, but he accounted for this by believing that he had on a swell suit such as are seldom seen in out-of-town places.

And he was dead right.

"Stag his nibe!" he heard somebody yell.

"Catch on to those togs!" was another cry.

"Shoot the duds!"

"Twig the style!"

"Where's Barnum?"

"What is it?"

"Tell me, and you may have it!" together with dozens of other cries, greeted him on all sides. But as he had no idea what they meant, and was particularly interested in himself just then, he was not disturbed in the least.

Arriving at the hotel, he was shown into the parlor, where the entire company was gathered.

It isn't enough to say he created a sensation, for it was more than that.

They all started up in astonishment.

They had hardly gotten over laughing about his trunk escapade when he entered the room.

At first they were astonished, then they yelled.

It was the most ridiculously comic make-up they had ever seen, off or on the stage.

up," and together they went carefully over Joshua's old clothes, taking especial pains to see if he had left any money in the pockets.

Meantime, Joshua was going to join his partner and the company at the hotel.

"That's Fifth Avenue swell," said he, grinning at the thought of her appreciating it.

"South Fifth Avenue, I guess."

"Do you like it?"

"Oh, immensely!" said she, laughing heartily.

"Isn't he a swell?" asked Gracie Montrose.

"No flies on him!" suggested Dick Dingle, walking around him admiringly, and then there was another burst of laughter.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Josh, looking savagely at him, for he had not forgotten Dick's last trick.

"Nothing, only I wish I had that suit."

"You be darned!"

"Now look here, Joshua Sheepshank; you are my partner. I have advertised you as such; but I won't have this," said Colonel Suckerbait.

"Won't have what?" asked Josh.

"This nonsense."

"Wal, what has that got to do with this new suit of clothes?"

"Why, don't you see that you are a guy?"

"Ther man said they were splendid," said Josh; and there was another laugh. "Don't they fit me all right?"

"Great Moses! Fit you? Yes, as a bag fits a brier-bush. Whoever sold them to you must have seen that you was green, or he never would have offered them to you. For goodness' sake, go and swap them for, almost anything that will hide your nakedness—even to a pair of overalls and a checked jumper."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. Why, you will be laughed at by everybody. Come with me, and let me get you a suit," added Suckerbait, leading him from the room.

"Keep that suit for me, won't you?" called Dick, but he got no reply.

Suckerbait was thoroughly disgusted, and his partner thoroughly ashamed.

They returned to the Jew's clothing shop, but that wily descendant of Abraham had suspected that his customer might be back again, and so he prudently closed up, and on a card announced a death in his family as being the cause of closing.

Of course Josh was not well enough acquainted with the city to be sure about the exact spot where he made his purchase, but both he and Suckerbait naturally thought that the closed shop was not the place.

So they went to a respectable store and bought a business suit, in which Josh looked considerably less like a guy than he did before, while Suckerbait had the other suit sent to the hotel for Dick to use in some of his impersonations.

But this episode took poor Joshua down very considerably, for now he could not help seeing what a greenhorn he was, and how utterly hopeless would be his case with the beautiful Angella Vandevere until he got to look and act more like an every-day young man of the period.

That night there was a crowded house to see the new play and the tremendously advertised combination, for the shrewd colonel had given away a large number of tickets.

Joshua was amazed at the outpouring, and began to think he was on the high-road to a big fortune.

And naturally enough he felt elated, and talked with almost everybody about everything he could think of, and was generally laughed at for his freshness.

The play of "The Chump's Bride" proved a puzzle to the audience, however.

It was the most curious hodge-podge of comedy and melodrama they had ever witnessed, although the acting was fair and the ladies acknowledged to be very pretty and taking.

Dick Dingle made the hit of the evening, though, in the little part he had, for some of his impersonations were first-rate.

But the play itself was not a success, although Suckerbait regarded it so.

He had "tried it on the dog," and the "dog" wouldn't have it.

That night at the hotel the company indulged in a little wine-supper at the expense of Sheepshank, to whom Angella had suggested that such a thing would be the proper caper.

And everybody was happy. Everybody predicted great things for the combination, and Suckerbait went so far as to say that he wouldn't take one hundred thousand dollars for his share of the enterprise.

And of course Sheepshank was proportionately elated, but not so much at his prospects of making a fortune as over the hope that his success would enable him to win the beautiful Angella.

She had never appeared so beautiful to him before, because he had never seen her "made up." But he didn't stop to think of that. She had always been an angel in his eyes, but when she went on the stage she seemed to have wings.

And she had smiled so sweetly on him several times during the evening that his heart was in his mouth all the time.

Only the more experienced members of the company, however, dreaded the second night, for they saw that the play was not a success, and knew that much of the applause came from deadheads.

But Colonel Suckerbait was no novice in the show business, although he allowed his vanity to mislead him regarding the merits of the piece, because he had written it himself.

He managed to get good notices in the morning papers, and, with a liberal supply of free tickets, looked confidently forward for a second and even greater ovation.

Dick Dingle had the giving away of the most of these tickets, and during the day managed to make many acquaintances, some of whom he amused with stories about Josh Sheepshank.

And in connection with half a dozen young fellows he worked up another nice little job that was to be played at the expense of Josh as usual.

Night came on, and those young fellows had front seats in the gallery, where it was noticed that they loudly applauded Dick whenever he made his appearance.

But although the house was well filled, the treasurer's box was not.

Indeed, there were scarcely fifty dollars in the house, although it looked good for a thousand.

But Josh never stopped to think of that, being continually behind the scenes and as near to his charmer as possible.

She knew what Dick was intending to do, and acted her part, as she usually did, by coquetting with Josh, flattering him into the belief that he himself could become a great actor.

This flattery had the desired effect before the close of the play was over, and he even began to long for an opportunity of going before an audience.

This was just what was wanted, and the mischievous star kept it up.

Finally, the curtain went down on the last act, and people rose to go, when there arose a cry in the gallery.

"Manager! Manager!"

People turned to see what it would amount to, and several took up the call in various parts of the house, some in derision and some from example.

Colonel Suckerbait had got through with his part by that time, and had gone out front, so Angella and Dick urged Josh to go before the curtain and bow his thanks.

"And if they sling you any bouquets bring them to me," said she, lovingly.

Josh waited to hear no more. Dick pulled aside the curtain, and he walked out for a profound bow.

Loud cheers followed, and while some yelled for a speech, the fellows in the gallery threw him two big bouquets, which he instantly went for so as to give them to Angella.

He took them up and bowed again, but while doing so a big fire-cracker exploded in each of them, shattering them and frightening the life nearly out of him.

He skipped out of sight, and a loud shout rose from the departing audience.

CHAPTER VII.

JOSHUA SHEEPSHANK was the most astonished man that ever dodged from the public gaze.

Miss Vandevere and Dick Dingle pretended to be greatly astonished also at the exploding bouquets which had been thrown him by the boys in the gallery, while Colonel Suckerbait rushed wildly back upon the stage to see what had happened.

And he was not in the best of humor either, on account of the "leanness" of the house.

"What in thunder is the matter here? Who fired those pistols?" he demanded, savagely.

"Pistils!" growled Sheepshank, blowing first one and then the other of his burned hands.

"Yes."

"Them warn't pistils."

"What were they, then?"

"Bouquets," said Josh, while Dick and Miss Vandevere laughed and tried to escape.

"Bouquets! What in thunder do you mean? Here, Dick, what is it?" he asked, calling back the smiling joker.

"I give it up, colonel. All I know is that when the curtain went down there was a call for the manager, and as you weren't here, Mr. Sheepshank went out to bow his thanks on behalf of the management, and somebody threw him two bouquets, which he picked up."

"Well?"

"Well, they exploded in his hands; that's all I know about it," replied Dick.

"Are you sure that is all you know about it?" demanded the angry colonel.

"Pon my word, ask Miss Angella."

"That's all I know about it, colonel," said the star of the combination.

"The gol-darndest, queerest bouquets ever I hearn tell of," suggested Josh. "Thort my time had come, for sure."

"Why, it was a joke—a practical joke—by some one. Of course it was. Who ever heard of a manager being called before the curtain?"

"Wal, yu don't catch me there ag'in."

"You had no business there, anyway."

"Wal, Angella said as how I ort tu go out an' make a little bow, an' gather up the posies. If they hung any, an'—"

"Oh, I understand it now. You are still very fresh, I see," said Suckerbait, turning away.

"No, I'll be gosh-darned if I be; I'm cured, an' purty near cooked," replied Josh.

The colonel made no reply, but he thought to himself that he would not only be fully cooked, but pretty well squeezed, if they didn't have any better business than met them at Newark.

In truth, the money taken in at the two performances was not enough to cover expenses, and now that they were to move on to Trenton, it would be absolutely necessary to call on Sheepshank for the advance of more money.

But it would never do to let him know the real truth of the matter, and so he resolved to make the excuse that he wanted to get more printing, and to give a few hundred dollars to the advance agent to meet current expenses with.

Dick Dingle followed Suckerbait out from behind the scenes, and out on the street he met his fellow-conspirators. Of course they had a good laugh over the success of their joke as they walked away towards the hotel.

Indeed, they envied Dick the fun he would probably have with Joshua Sheepshank before he got through with him.

Sheepshank, however, ceased to feel the burns on his hands when he found that he had been left alone with Miss Vandevere, on whom he was so terribly "stuck."

"What a shame!" said she, with mock sympathy, but which Josh thought real.

"Yes, it's a gosh-darned shame that I didn't get them 'ere posies for yu, Angella. But never mind, we'll go out an' buy one, b'gosh."

"Oh, no. I don't care for one now. If you are going to spend money, make it oysters."

"All right, b'gosh. Come on!" said he, turning to find his hat that he had placed on the prompter's shelf when he went out before the curtain.

"I'm your Kitydid, Joshua," replied the artful coquette, joyously.

"Yes; yu may be my Kitydid or my grasahopper, but whar's my hat?" he asked, looking anxiously around.

"Why, surely, I don't know. Where is it?"

"I put it there on that shelf when I went out tu bow, but I don't see it nowhere."

"Well, that's funny," mused Angella, who was thinking about the oysters, and not a little annoyed at the loss, as it might burst up her expected supper.

"Wal, b'gosh, that beats all nater. Some feller must have hooked it," he mused.

Just then the stage-carpenter, the only other person in the building at the time, came along.

"All out. I'm going to turn off the gas."

"No, yu arn't," said Josh.

"Why not?"

"Somebody has hooked my hat."

"Well, I can't help that. Everybody else has gone, and I must close the theater."

"But, gosh darn yu're picter, I can't go without a hat," growled Josh.

"But if you haven't it, you'll have to go without it, for you can't go with it."

"Somebody has stolen it, b'gosh."

"Well, that is not my fault. Buy another."

"But it is too late," said Miss Vandevere, "and he cannot go home bare-headed. Haven't you got a spare hat to lend him?"

"No; but I will sell him this one for a dollar," said the man, taking off his own.

"Let's try it," said Josh, and finding that it fitted him and wasn't quite so bad as a tramp's, and was at least a dollar's worth more than no hat at all, he paid him the money and, with Miss Vandevere, left the theater.

That wicked stage-carpenter smiled a smile that was child-like and bland.

He also proceeded to a private closet, and there covered his knowledge-box with the identical hat that Sheepshank had lost.

"Good hat and a dollar to boot," he mused, as he turned out the gas and strode homeward.

The old hat that Josh had paid so dearly for was a pretty bad one to look at when he came to get into a brighter light, but, as Miss Vandevere was very hungry, it was not bad enough to keep her from going with him for her oysters.

Josh, however, did not like the idea of being imposed upon in this way, and he said, as he tucked the hat out of sight when they sat down to the table, that he would make it tolerably tropical for the chap who stole his hat—if he could only find him.

"You are having hard luck to-night," suggested Miss Vandevere.

"Wal, I should say so. But, b'gosh, I don't care so long's I got yu, Angella," said he, with a prodigious grin.

In truth, the coquettish Angella didn't care either, so long as she had her oysters.

"Now, say, Angella, yu sorter like me, don't yu?" he finally asked.

"Hush! don't talk so loud. Everybody in the saloon will hear you," said she, reprovingly.

"Wal, yer du, though, don't yu, Angella?" he asked again, quietly.

"Why, of course."

"But what makes yu so kinder skittish?"

"I don't understand you, Josh."

"Why, I can't seem to break yu tu harness."

"Break me to what?" she asked, earnestly.

"Wal, yu don't seem tu trot my gait."

"I should hope not."

"But if yu don't—how be we ever goin' tu hitch up in double harness?"

"Oh, pshaw! Single harness is good enough for me," said she, archly.

"Oh, b'gosh, but I want tu get married, an' every time I look at yu, Angella, it makes me feel in a hurry 'bout it tu, b'gosh."

"Oh, there's time enough yet."

"Time enough!"

"Yes, we are both young yet."

"Wal, while I'm waitin' some other chap may come along an' knock off the plum, b'gosh. I've allus hearn tell as how delays war dangerous."

"Not in this case, Josh, for I am in no hurry to be knocked off. I want reputation before I get a husband."

"But only see how I can help yu on."

"Yes, but wouldn't you do it just as quick if we were engaged as if we were married?" she asked, archly.

"Wal, now—"

"Of course you would, if you loved me."

"But I'm sorter 'fraid," he mused.

"Afraid of what?"

"Of losin' yu."

"Nonsense."

"But that ere Dunellen seems tu be sorter sweet round yu, an' I don't like it."

"Oh, pshaw! I can't help that, can I?"

"But it don't seem tu hurt yu're feelin's much. I seen him with his arm round yu're waist tu-night behind the scenes, an' yu didn't seem tu be in much, if any, pain. Yu didn't make up faces as though yu was havin' a tuth pulled, or try tu get away from him," replied Josh, in downright earnest.

"Oh, you jealous goosel! We were rehearsing a new part, that's all," said she, laughing.

"Wal, yes, I thort so, an' I thort as how I'd sorter like tu play his part myself."

"Oh, you will never do for the husband of an actress, if you take notice of little things like that," said she, shaking her head.

"But I shouldn't be jealous if we war married."

"Oh, yes, you would, and if you saw me going through a love-scene or tender part in quiet rehearsal, you'd go crazy."

"Jest try me, Angella."

"No, not yet."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to run the risk. But if you will stand by me until I get a big name, I will marry you."

"Will yu, though?"

"Yes, for by that time you will get used to the tricks of the profession, and won't mind what you notice now. Ah! here come our oysters," she added, gleefully.

Her animation showed what was agitating her heart just then.

The waiter brought two fragrant stews and placed them before his customers.

"Yum-yum! how good they smell!" said she.

"Which du yu love best, oysters or me?" asked Josh, with a grin.

"What a comparison!" said she, preparing her stew to meet the expectations of her palate.

And Josh laughed, because he thought, of course, that the answer would be in his favor.

"As for me, I don't like 'em much. Never ate any of the darned slippery things 'til I got to York."

"Ah! but these are stewed to a shake, and you cannot help liking them."

"Wal, I orter like 'em if yu du," said he, as he put in pepper and butter, as he saw her do.

"Of course; and every time you want to call me closer to your palpitating heart, just suggest oysters after the performance is over."

"Then, b'gosh, yu'd get oysters every night."

"And my great love has stomach for them all!" said she, with a stage tone and gesture.

"Hello! what in thunder is this?" he asked, looking wildly into his plate. "Here, waiter, come here!" he bawled, and that aproned knight of the table hurried to obey.

"What is it, sir?"

"What is it? Look at that gol-darned, big red spider!" said he, starting back. "Is that the way yu serve customers? Take it away, an' see if yu can't get me up a stew without any of them pizen critters in it. Ough!"

"Why, sir, that is only an oyster-crab," said the waiter, smiling.

"Oyster-crab?"

"Yes, and very highly esteemed by connoisseurs."

"Wal, I'm no connoisseur. Take it away."

"Give it to me, Josh?" said Miss Vandevere.

"What! pizen yul? I guess not."

"Why, they are better than the oysters themselves. Give it to me."

Reluctantly he placed it in her dish, and she took it in her mouth. Then rolling up her beautiful eyes, she murmured "Yum-yum!" greedily to Josh's surprise and disgust.

"Wal, I'll be gol-darned!" said he.

"Got any more?"

"I hope not. But I thort as how it war a pesky red spider."

"I'll take all yu find."

To this Josh made no reply; but in truth the little crab had taken away his appetite, so that he scarcely tasted of the stew.

After finishing, nowever, they went to the hotel where the other members of the great combination were stopping, and Angella soon sought her room, while Josh sauntered around to see what was going on.

Colonel Suckerbait, meanwhile, with the assistance of Dick Dingle, had completed the necessary arrangements for taking a morning train for Trenton, the next place they were going to inflict.

The colonel wasn't in the best of humor, but he knew how to brace up under difficulties.

"Wal," said Josh, "how are things goin'?"

"From here to Trenton," said he, demurely.

"Yes, but the other way?"

"We are not going the other way just yet."

"I mean money matters. How much have we made here?"

This was a poser; but Suckerbait was equal to the occasion.

"Oh, we have done very well here—everything considered. Of course, there are a great many unforeseen expenses to meet when we first start out, but once we get under good headway, we shall coin money."

"That's the tork, colonel," said Josh.

"But I shall have to draw five hundred more to pay for advertising, and give to Bower, our advance agent, who must have money, yu know, to secure theaters and advertise in the papers. Make it five-fifty, so I shall be easy, and then, don't yu see, I shan't have to touch the receipts, so that at the end of a month we can see how much we have on hand and make a divvy. See?"

"Yaas—if that's ther way yu're goin' to work it," mused Josh, somewhat thoughtfully.

"To be sure. That is the best way—the way, in fact, that all shows do on the road."

"But yu think there's no doubt 'bout it's payin', do yu, colonel?"

"Doubt, dear boy—not the shadow of one. We are only feeling our way now. Yu must know that this part of the country is surfeited with all kinds of shows, and the circuses have got the start of us on the road, but, after we get further away, and out of the course of these money-gatherers, we shall be all right. Of course, we can't expect to make much money just yet; but it's coming, dear boy, coming—bound to come. Five-fifty, please," he added.

Josh had drawn the remainder of his money from the bank before they left New York, and was smart enough to put it in his pocket, greatly to the chagrin of Suckerbait, who had fondly dreamed of handling it himself instead of being obliged to handle his bucolic partner in so careful a way; but there was no help for it now.

He didn't exactly like to draw any further on his capital, and demurred a little when the gallant colonel asked for this amount.

"Why, don't yu see it is all right, dear boy?"

"Wal, yea, I s'pose 'tis, but somehow or other I put in all ther money and yu nothin'."

"Nothing, my dear boy—nothing!" exclaimed Suckerbait. "Are thought, brains, experience, genius, nothin'? Why did I advertise for a partner with ten thousand dollars?"

If Joshua Sheepshank had been fly he would have answered, "Because yu hoped to catch a sucker," but he said nothing, thought of nothing, hardly, but the bewitching actress, Angella Vandevere.

"Because," continued the colonel, earnestly, and with the proper dramatic intonation—"because I

knew that my play, my experience, my name, and my combination, stood for an equal amount, if not a great deal more. Yu came; yu put in yur money against all these; I am expending my capital along with yurs. See?"

"Wal, yea, I guess yu're right," said Josh, going for his big wallet and counting out the sum demanded.

"Of course I am," replied Suckerbait, as he fondled the bills. "Yu will see it in the same light I do after yu get used to the business. It is all new to yu now, and what yu want is to keep yur eye out and catch on."

"Wal, say, colonel, what du yu think 'bout Angie—think she'll have me?" he asked.

"Now, Josh, when yu have known professional women as long as I have yu will know that it is hard telling about them. But—this between ourselves, mind yu—I should judge, from what she has told me, that she has more than an ordinary interest in yu. But remember, she is a tease," he added.

"Yea, b'gosh, I know she is."

"Well, govern yurself accordingly, and whenever I can speak a good word for yu, dear boy, depend upon it, I shall do so. But I must go now," he said, starting away.

"I'll have her yet, b'gosh, if she is a tease," mused Josh, as he went to his room.

The next morning everything was astir, and Colonel Suckerbait the big toad of the puddle, because of being flush once more, and the way he ordered things around was a caution. Indeed, he made himself the observed of all observers, as, with hat tipped forward until it almost came in contact with the twenty-five cent cigar he was smoking, he strutted around.

Dick Dingle, as usual, had charge of the baggage, and it required an extra car to take it, although the old trunk in which Joshua had ridden from New York was left behind, and just before the train started the great combination was at the depot in waiting.

Josh was there trying to make himself useful, and after the baggage was all into the car, Dick turned to him, in his honest way:

"I say, Mr. Sheepshank, Miss Vandevere wants yu to look carefully after her trunks, as she fears one or two of them are not locked. Get right into the baggage-car and ride to Trenton, so as to watch them."

"All right; b'gosh, I'm thar," said he, starting for the car door.

"Don't let anybody fool around them."

"Not much, b'gosh," and he clambered into the car door, bound to be faithful to the trust of looking after his darling's trunks.

In a minute or so the train drew out of Newark, and went puffing on its way, with all kinds of people on board.

But it had scarcely reached the outskirts of the city, when a big, strapping baggage-smasher belonging to the train entered the car where Josh was on watch, coming from the other end of it.

"Hello! what the deuce are yu doing here?" he demanded of Josh.

"Keepin' watch of trunks. Who be yu?"

"Yu just get out of this or I will show yu who I am."

"Wal, I calkerlate I won't. I guess yu're one of them darned thieves as sneaks round robbin' folks. Wouldn't wonder if yu had my hat. Better git out, I tell yu. I'm set here to watch this mess of trunks, an' I'm goin' to du it, in spite of any such cuss as yu be."

"Oh, yu are, eh? I'll bet yu are a sneak-thief yurself. Git!" and he approached him in a threatening manner.

"No, siree! Git yureself!"

"Yu won't, eh?"

"No, I won't."

"We'll see about that," replied the smasher and bruiser of trunks, seizing him.

"Lemme bet Murder!"

"Shut up!"

"Perlice! robbers! thieves!"

Hustling him towards the side-door, the burly trunk-wrestler picked him up bodily and chucked him headlong from the car.

They were going through a boggy flat just then, and poor Josh went into the soft ooze nearly out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR Joshua Sheepshank was deeper in the mud than he ever was before, and so nearly was the breath knocked out of him, that it was with the utmost difficulty that he extricated himself from the slimy and sinking mud.

And when he did succeed in pulling himself out and getting upon his feet again, he was a sight to behold.

Scooping the mud from his eyes, he gazed mournfully after the receding train; and in his bewilderment actually beckoned for it to come back.

Dick Dingle and one or two others had seen something disappearing in the bog as the train rushed by, but both the object and the train went so fast that it was impossible to tell what it was.

Nobody thought about poor Josh, with the exception, perhaps, of Dick Dingle, who had gotten him into the scrape, and even he was wondering only how he was getting along with the belligerent baggage-smasher.

On the arrival of the train at Trenton, the trunks were hustled out by the hustler, but nothing was to be seen of Sheepshank.

"Where is the man that was in the car here to watch the baggage?" asked Dick.

"What man?"

"Why, one of our company."

"A green Yank?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"I took him for a sneak, and threw him out of the car-door just this side of Newark."

"The deuce yu did!"

"Yea. Was he one of yur gang?"

"Of course he was, and yu had no business to throw him out," replied Dick, who now began to tremble for the consequences.

"Well, he had no business in the car. But yu'll find him back there in the mud," said he, as the train moved away.

"What is it?" asked Suckerbait, coming up.

"Why, Mr. Sheepshank went into the baggage-car to look after Miss Vandevere's trunks, and the baggage-master threw him out into the bogs just this side of Newark," replied Dick.

"That is outrageous," said Suckerbait. "Who knows but he is killed? Take the next train, Dick, and go back and see if yu can find him. Confound the luck, he has got more than half of the ten thousand dollars yet."

"Oh, oh!" cried the female members of the combination, on hearing about it. "What a shame!"

"But he had no business in the car, at all events, and probably the trunk-buster took him for a sneak-thief."

"That's just what he said he did."

"But how came he to go there, anyway?"

"Why, he was afraid that something would happen to Miss Vandevere's trunks," said Dick.

"What a mash yu have made of that jay," said De Arcy Dunellen, reproachfully.

"Did yu tell him to go in there, Dick?" asked Suckerbait.

"No; I only told him that if he felt so anxious about her trunks, he had better go and sit on them, that's all; and not seeing him in the car with the rest of us, I took it for granted that he had done so. But I never thought of this."

"Oh, confound yu, Dick Dingle, yu are continually getting that man into some scrape or other, and I tell yu it must stop. Here comes the Newark train. Get aboard and go for him," growled Suckerbait, handing him a five-dollar bill.

With some considerable uneasiness Dick bought his ticket and boarded the train, while the other members of the company went to the hotel, having their hearts made glad on the way by flaming posters and lithographs of themselves stuck nearly everywhere.

But let us return to Josh Sheepshank.

Pulling himself together, he scraped off mud enough to enable him to reach the railroad track, where he stood, a picture of woe and physical degradation, although, fortunately, he was not badly injured.

"Gosh darn that cuss, he wanted to murder me so as he could get at them trunks. S'pose he has hooked everything in 'em by this time. Oh, how I do stink! Whew! This ere mud would pizen skunks. Wonder b'gosh, if there's any law in ther land: I thar is, I'll jug that rapscallion if I can ever find him. Wonder where my new hat is? Gol darn my bates, I lose a new hat every day of my life. S'pose that one's in the bottom of that thar ditch. Wonder what's goin' to happen me next? Wish, b'gosh, that I'd stayed to hum with ther old folks. I'm like a lost calf in these parts," he mused, and then looked at himself. "Wal, I'm a purty bird, arnt I? Wonder what Angie would say to me now? Whew! Guess a whole bottle of that 'ere nice-smellin' water wouldn't make me bearable. Goshermighty!" he exclaimed, and giving a grand leap, he just escaped a train of cars by jumping into another ditch.

Into this one he went on all-fours, and into it he sank clear to his ears.

It was a narrow escape for his life, and he had quite as much difficulty in getting out as he had had before.

But he finally managed to crawl up on the bank again, and to get some of the thickest of the mud from his face and hands, and, if it was possible, he looked worse than before.

His face, hands, shirt—everything was black with mud, and it would have puzzled a doctor to make out what he really was.

There was one thing that he was, however, a terribly mad man. Two involuntary mud-baths was more than he could stand with Christian fortitude.

Yes, he was mad clean through now.

"Gol darn my bates and buttons!" said he. "Wonder what'll happen next? They might as well kill me an' have done with it. Gol darn my old aunt's old cat's tail, if this don't cap the climax—it does, b'gosh! Don't b'lieve I've any business in these parts, anyhow, an' ther best thing I can du is to go back to Vermont. I'm out of my latitude down this way. But ther fust thing to du is to get back to Newark an' buy some new clothes, gosh darn the luck! Never spent so much money for clothes in all my life afore," he growled, and still growling at his luck, he began to plod wearily back to town again.

Before going far, he found a creek, in which he washed his face and hands, which made him both feel and look a little better, and as the mud dried it peeled off considerably, so that by the time he reached Newark he looked some like a human being.

At the railway station he found Dick Dingle, who had just arrived from Trenton in quest of him, and so glad was he that he was able to walk, and no bones broken, that he couldn't help laughing, although he took good care not to let Josh catch him at it.

"Why, hello, Mr. Sheepshank! where the dickens have yu been?" he asked, seemingly astonished.

"Is that yu, Dick?"

"Yea. The colonel sent me back to find yu. Where have yu been?"

"Where have I been!" said he, bitterly.

"Yea. I thought yu got aboard the train."

"Oh, yu did, hey?"

"Yea. But when we arrived at Trenton yu was nowhere to be found, and I came back after yu."

Josh remained silent. If he hadn't been so muddled there would have been a good chance to lie out of the whole business, for he didn't care to have the company know all that had befallen him; but how to account for his hatless and muddy condition was what puzzled him.

"Didn't you get into the baggage-car?" asked Dick, after a little pause.

"Wal, yes; but I fell out of the door an' got sorter mussed up," said he, at length.

"Well, I should say so. Hurt you?"

"Not much. Didn't break any bones so far's I know; but it wasn't much of a picnic, I can tell yu."

"I should say not. But come, let's go where you can get some clean clothes and a bath; then I guess you'll be all right."

"Don't say anything 'bout it, will yu, Dick?" he asked, as they moved away.

"How?"

"Tell 'em I got left behind."

"Well, that's just what happened to you, eh?"

"Guess it was. But ther gurls would laugh if they thort I fell outn ther car-door."

"All right."

"But say, were the trunks all right when they got to Trenton?"

"Of course they were. Why?"

"None on 'em bust open?"

"No."

"Nothin' hooked?"

"Nixey."

"Wal, that's queer," mused Josh, who had all the while suspected that the burly fellow who fired him from the car-door was no more nor less than a robber.

But he finally concluded that the man was right and the proper boss of the situation, both by authority and physical strength, and that he should not have been so hasty in ordering him out as he did, so he said nothing more on the subject.

Dick, however, was glad enough that the racket had turned out as harmlessly as it had, and was ready to agree to anything.

A new suit of clothes was procured, and after a good soaking in a bath-tub, Joshua Sheepshank came out looking as well as ever, if, indeed, not better.

Two hours later they took the train for Trenton again, where they arrived in due time, and where Dick told the story—with a wink—that Josh had requested him to give.

That, however, did not blind Suckerbait and the other members of the combination to the real facts of the case. They knew he had been thrown from the baggage-car, and were very thankful that he was not killed.

Colonel Suckerbait had been busy with the newspaper men all day, and Africanus Muff had not slighted a place where a show-bill could be put up, so that by the time the gas-lights began to twinkle in the windows and on the streets, quite a good-sized boom had been worked up for "The Chump's Wife" and the great combination.

The colonel had not been quite so lavish with his dead-head tickets as he was at Newark, resolving to test the strength of legitimate advertising the first night; and if it failed, or the play did not give satisfaction, he would resort to that snap to fill the house the second night.

But the legitimate did the business that time, and the theater was packed. Indeed, there must have been at least three hundred dollars over and above expenses, which made the colonel feel his oats very unmistakably.

Indeed, every member of his company felt good, and the result was that the play went off in fine style, so far as it could, for in spite of everything, no one who witnessed it could make out what it was all about. Indeed, the actors themselves didn't know.

But there were clever bits in it, and some fine part-acting, especially the character-acting and make-ups of Dick Dingle, who, as before, carried off the honors, although Colonel Suckerbait would have it that his enacting of the villainous father was what snatched the cake.

"Ah, there, dear boy!" he said between the acts, as Josh sauntered around to where he was. "What think of this, eh? How's this for a house? Didn't I tell you? Thousands in it, dear boy—thousands, only let us get a-going. Of course we are liable to get poor houses occasionally; but take the season's business, and I assure you, dear boy, we have struck it fat."

"Fat, eh? No danger of gettin' down to the bone, is there?" asked Josh, with a grin.

"None whatever. Our fortunes are made. All ready for the third act!" he called, as the orchestra finished playing.

This act opened with the discovery of *Angelina Dering*, the heroine, seated on a sofa.

Miss Vandevere was in position, ready to speak her lines when the curtain went up.

Josh Sheepshank espied her seated there so demurely, and skipped to a place by her side.

"How darnation purty yu look to-night, Angie," said he, ardently.

"Quick, go away, the curtain—"

"Gol darn the curtain. Nobody can see through it, an' yu can't bluff me that way," said he, trying to get hold of her hand.

But just then the curtain was rung up.

A great flood of light from the foot-lights dazed and dazzled him.

He leaped to his feet.

"Oh, b'gosh—"

And seeing that something was wrong, the audience began to laugh.

"Get off, get off, you clown!" cried Suckerbait, in a whisper, as it were, but loud enough for half of the audience to hear. "Oh, that fool will ruin me!" he added.

Josh looked around for an instant, and seeing that he was out of place, he made a bolt for the wings, and had he really been enacting a low comedian's part, he could not have raised a louder shout.

Some, doubtless, regarded it as a part in the piece, and laughed because it was so comical. Indeed, it might have been, so far as the continuity and rationality of the play was concerned.

But it broke Angelina all up. She had to begin with a tearful, pathetic speech which in no way harmonized or accorded with the laughter he had raised in front.

Nor was this all or the worst of it, for a lot of wags in the galleries who took in the whole situation began to applaud for the purpose of recalling Josh.

And there were cat-calls and stamping of feet, with cries of:

"Come out!"

"Do it again!"

"Hi—hi—hi!"

"Speech—speech!"

And the confusion grew as one after another tumbled to the joke, until Suckerbait, in wild despair, was obliged to ring down the curtain to stop the row.

Then, with as good a grace and face as he could command, he went in front of it and bowed to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I trust you will overlook this little mistake on the part of a stranger in the profession, and let the play proceed."

Then, bowing with all his before-the-curtain grace, he withdrew, and in about a minute the curtain rose again, and *Angelina* proceeded with her part with some difficulty.

This was one of her best scenes that Josh had thus ruthlessly spoiled, and she could have choked him for it.

But she succeeded very well under the circumstances, and was rewarded with some charitable applause. And so the play went on.

Suckerbait, however, was the wildest of any one. He wanted to kick the unfortunate jay all around the block, but the fact of his being so useful and necessary in a financial point of view restrained him somewhat.

"Josh, put it there! Let me press your flesh!" said Dick, into whose arms he almost fell as he ran off the stage.

"What for?" he asked, in a dazed way, for he scarcely knew what he was doing, anyway.

"For luck," replied Dick. "Let me press the flesh of a successful man;" and he seized him by the hand and shook it extravagantly.

"Git out!"

"Not much! You have made a hit, and it's a rare thing to do. Hear the recall!" he added, while the row was up in front.

"Gol darn the luck! what made them h'ist ther darned rag afore I got off?" he asked, but still looking wildly around.

"I'll tell you, Josh—but don't give it away. The piece was dragging a little, and the colonel wanted to 'liven it up a bit. See?"

"No, I don't see, b'gosh. Somethin' or other's allus happenin' to me."

"Wish such things would happen to me," said Harry Pratt. "I'd like to get a recall."

And so they chaffed and geyed him until Miss Vandevere came off, when she went for him.

"You are a nice man, ain't you?" said she, sneeringly.

"Why, Dick says I made a hit," he replied.

"You should have received a hit with a ten-pound club! Didn't I tell you?"

"Wal, Angie, I thort yu were a-foolin'."

"Bah!" was her only reply, as she hurried away to her dressing-room.

"Guess I've put my big foot in it ag'in," he mused, and then got out in front, where he was at once recognized by a large number, who gave him a regular ovation, mingled with geying and laughter from all sides.

"What in thunder's ther matter with ther darned idiots? Didn't they ever see a man afore?" he growled, as he walked out into the vestibule.

Well, the curtain finally went down on the last act, and in a state of bewilderment the people arose to go.

But several young fellows in the galleries shouted loudly for Josh, and would not be satisfied without he responded.

Dick Dingle was equal to the emergency, and hastily making himself up like Joshua Sheepshank, he went in front of the curtain.

The audience instantly thought it was the original, such an adept was Dick, and they howled with delight.

Dick bowed in Josh's awkward manner, and assumed his grin.

"Speech! speech!" came from all sides; and Dick began in Josh's tone exactly, and although the audience did not know what that tone really was, they saw at once that it harmonized with the character.

"Citizens an' folks,—Unaccustomed as I am to public speakin', I cum out 'cause yu hollered for me—"

"Hi! hi!"

"I sorter somehow seem to have tickled yu this evenin'; but it war all a mistake. I didn't know ther darned ole curtin was goin' up so quick, an' I was improvin' ther time, sorter makin' love to my best gal—"

"Hi! hi! hi!"

"Bully boy!" and various other cries.

"So I hope yu'll pardin me—not that I'm 'shamed of the gal, but it makes me feel sorter sheepish to get caught a-cortin' her. Cum round here to-morrer night, an' I'll make yu haf some more. I'm a cute one at it, I tell yu. I'm right down from Vermont,

an' I'm homespun. But I'm all wool, b'gosh!" saying which he withdrew amid a wave of laughter.

It was an egregious farce, but the way Dick Dingle ended it harmonized the whole business, so well that people went away divided in opinion, as to who had carried off the honors of the evening, Dick Dingle or Joshua Sheepshank, of course, not knowing them apart.

And it mollified Suckerbait and Angelina to such an extent that they could but laugh. But, badly as she wanted to, Miss Vandevere refused to go to supper with Josh after the show was over, and was escorted to the hotel by Dunellen, much to Josh's disgust.

And he had seen Dick personate him so true to life that he felt as though he had been stealing lame chickens. Indeed, from that time forward he vowed that he would brace up and try to shake off some of his green barnacles.

Suckerbait, however, gave him another of his lectures, and after appealing to him to take another tack and put on some style, he warned him against going on the stage again while the play was in progress, whether the curtain was up or down.

"All right, colonel, only I don't want that darned Dick Dingle to take me off ther way he did to-night. It sorter hurts my feelins," said he.

"Well, it all went for the best. A little salt won't do you any harm, anyhow. But in the future, see if you can't brace up," said he, as they parted for the night.

"He thinks I'm to fresh, an' b'gosh, I guess I am," he mused, as he went to his room.

Seeing how well his character and speech took with the audience, Dick Dingle began to think over how he could work Josh for the following night.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGELY enough, the second night in Trenton, in spite of the incongruous play and the mishaps that attended it on the first night, drew more than a paying house.

The fact was, the extempore and wholly unexpected fun made by Josh Sheepshank and Dick Dingle in his make-up and speech before the curtain had made a hit, and although nobody understood why it was so, any more than they understood why the play was what it was, they naturally concluded that there would be some more fun of the same sort on the following night.

Indeed, Dick in his speech had promised them as much, and on that account Josh was the most talked of individual of the entire combination.

To add to this, the *Gazette* came out the next day with a squib relating to the affair that produced more amusement and talk, the very best advertising that could be had.

Nothing like getting a thing talked about.

The next day was spent by most of the company in going about the place, visiting the old battle-field and other objects of interest, although Dick was attending strictly to business.

The effect of a visit to the battle-field roused Josh's patriotism to the highest pitch.

It was the same with him as with most Yankees who have not seen much of the world but have the history of the Revolution all by heart. A visit to Bunker Hill, Lexington, Monmouth, Trenton, or even to the scene of the disastrous Battle of Long Island, rouses their eloquence and belligerency to the highest pitch.

All these places to them are scenes of carnage and the triumph of American valor. They know of no retreats or defeats in that long, hard struggle for independence. To them it was a long brilliant struggle in which victory perched on the American banner until the minions of tyranny were driven from our shores and Hall Columbia danced a breakdown on the ensanguined fields of Yorktown.

Josh Sheepshank had read all about the memorable Battle of Trenton, and when he found himself on the scene thereof, he had to unbutton his vest because of the swelling of his patriotic heart.

A guide was showing them about, and pointing out the places of interest connected with the historic battle.

"Geshermighty, mister, yu don't tell me that this is ther real spot?" said he, looking around with pride.

"Yes, sir, this is indeed the battle-field of Trenton. On this spot stood Washington. Yonder rode Greene and the intrepid Wayne. Behind entrenchments just here stood those sturdy souls who waited for the approach of the Hessians; and yonder, just in front, is where they fell, biting the dust before the unerring aim of the Americans."

"Yu bet they did, b'gosh!" exclaimed Josh. "Didn't we lick thunder an' blazes out of them gold-darned Britishers? Didn't we make 'em whistle Yankee Doodle backwards? Wal, rather. Gol darn my sisters' cat's tail, I'd just like to meet a Britisher here just now! I'd make him stand on his head an' whistle Hall Columbia—I would, b'gosh!" said he, vehemently.

"What good would that do you?" asked Miss Vandevere, who was one of the visiting party.

"It would sorter pacify me, b'gosh. My grand-father fit all through the Revolution, an' my dad helped lick 'em at New Orleans, an' I don't think I'll die happy till I kill an Englishman, just to keep up the reputation of the family," said he, spanking his hands together with a sharp crack.

"Feel very much like it?" asked a young man who had listened to him.

"Yes, b'gosh! Show me one!" cried Josh.

"All right," replied the young fellow, throwing aside his coat and hat. "Here you are," he added, putting up his hands.

"Be yu a Britisher?"

"Every inch of one."
 "Wal, I'm all Yank. Come on," replied Josh, also squaring off.
 There was very little sparring for an opening, for Josh knew little or nothing about such things, while the young stranger did.
 Josh came in contact with something, and suddenly lay down to grunt, while the guide and two, or three others hastened to interfere and put a stop to the fight.
 "Away with you," said the guide, "or I will call for that officer yonder," taking the young Englishman by the arm.

"And yet you, being the challenging party, should have been ready," remarked Colonel Suckerbait.
 "I didn't challenge nobody. I only said as how I wanted to lick an Englishman."
 "Well, why didn't you do it?"
 "They wouldn't give me time."
 "That was too bad."
 "So it was, b'gosh. They hustled him away afore I could get at him."
 "What a shame!"
 "Yes, an', b'gosh, I've a darned good mind to go back an' see if I can find him, ther darned British skunk!"

"She says it was a shame that they would not give you a fair show. She thinks you could have punched the whole head off of him if they had not run him out of your reach."
 "In course I could. Gol darn his mutton; I'll find him yet!" he added, with clenched fists.
 "And you can call on me if you want any help," said Dick, seizing his hand.
 "Oh, I'm all he wants, b'gosh! He'll think a hoss kicked him if I get at him."
 "Bully for you! Coming to the theater to-night, arn't you?" he asked.
 "In course, I am. There's nothing to be 'shamed



Scooping the mud from his eyes, he gazed mournfully after the receding train, and in his bewilderment actually beckoned for it to come back.

He made not a word of reply, but put on his coat and hat again, while Josh struggled to his feet with his hand over his eye.
 "If you want any more, call and see me," said the Englishman, throwing down a card.
 "Yu go to thunder!" roared Josh.
 His antagonist turned as though to hit him again, but the peace-makers hurried him away.
 "I kin lick 'bout a dozen of such chaps as yu be, b'gosh. Come on!"

"Do be quiet," said Miss Vandevere, in seriousness, although ready to burst with laughter.
 "I mean it, b'gosh. Come back here!"
 But the fellow didn't come.
 "What is the matter with your eye, Josh?" asked Dunellen, as though in earnest.
 "Why, the gol-darned mean skunk hit me there," said he, indignantly.

"Well, what did you expect?" asked Pratt. "That he was going to turn you around and hit you on the back?" at which they all laughed.
 "Wal, it was darned mean to hit a feller in the eye, b'gosh;" but all of his protestations failed to keep the company from laughing, as they also failed to keep his eye from becoming black.

But this little episode somehow took the brag and buncombe out of Josh, and he failed to enthuse the least bit more after the guide returned and finished showing them over the ground.
 An hour later they all returned to the hotel, where Josh's black eye was noticed, and much fun indulged in by explaining it.

"The Battle of Trenton has been fought over again to-day," said Mr. Dunellen.
 "No, b'gosh, we didn't get a-go'n'," put in Josh, who kept feeling braver all the time.
 "Well, we certainly saw you going," said Miss Vandevere, laughing merrily.
 "But he hit me afore I was ready."

"Here he comes!" cried Harry Pratt.
 "W—where?" asked Josh, looking around in a frightened sort of way.
 "Oh, no, it's somebody else."
 "You bet, b'gosh, he'd better not cam fulin' rund me any more," said he, recovering from his fright.
 But he only got laughed at, after all.
 "Well, Josh, how long will it take for you to get over being fresh?" asked the colonel.
 "What's fresh got to do with it?"
 "Everything. If you hadn't shot off your mouth so loudly about Englishmen, simply because this country happened to have a little difficulty with them over a hundred years ago, you would not have got into trouble. See?" said the colonel.
 "Wal, I hate 'em, b'gosh! My dad and my grand-dad hated 'em like pizen afore me."
 "All right; but unless you want to carry your eyes in mourning all the time, I advise you not to make a personal matter of it," said he, at which everybody laughed.

Josh sought the seclusion of his own room, and took a look at himself in the glass.
 It looked as though the Battle of Trenton had been fought over again, and, unless the other fellow was in hospital, Josh had certainly gotten the worst of it.
 He bathed it tenderly, and took in a new stock of hatred for Englishmen.

It was bad enough as it stood, but before night the particulars as to how he got a black eye became known all over town, and Dick Dingle was not slow in circulating the story among the young fellows whose acquaintance he had made while there.

To Dick's thinking, it was one of the funniest things imaginable.

"But I wouldn't mind it," said he, speaking to Josh about it in the afternoon; "just brace right up as though nothing had happened."

"In course I will. Say, Dick, what does Angie say 'bout it?"

on in gettin' hit, 'specially when a chap takes yu on-awares. But I shan't go in front much. I'll be behind ther scenes, so as to take Angie home."

"Of course."
 "Now, say, Dick, what do yu think of that girl?"
 "Think of her! Why, she is one of the sweetest, truest, most talented ladies in the profession," said Dick, with sober enthusiasm.

"B'gosh, I think so too! Say, Dick, wonder if she likes me?" he added, softly.

"Oh, dead sure."
 "Do yu really think so?"
 "Of course I do. But she's a sort of sly-boots, and won't let you know it right out."

"Wal, but how 'bout that Dunellen chap? He is kinder hangin' round as though she sorter sweetened his coffee."

"Oh, that's nothing. You needn't be afraid, Josh. He's got a wife and nine children."

"Grut gosh! You don't say so!"
 "Fact, only don't say I said so."

"But does Angie know it?"
 "Oh, yes. Have no fear. Be in the greenroom this evening, for she'll expect you."

"Yu bet I will, an' b'gosh, if that Dunellen chap don't keep away, I'll make him sick."

"That's all right," and Dick left him.

Josh intended to escort Angie to the theater that night, but she got ahead of him, and his rival did the polite in his place.

But he wasn't going to stay away on that account. He would take her out to oysters after the performance, and get ahead in that way.

Of course, boys, you know what a theater greenroom is, but have you ever seen a trick-chair? Perhaps you have in pantomimes.

Well, there was a trick-chair that belonged to the theater properties—one of those artful and comical contrivances that would play tricks on anybody that sat down in it.

And by the time that Josh got ready to go behind the scenes, the members of the company were all dressed for their parts and seated in the greenroom indulging in conversation and speculations regarding the house, that was by this time pretty well filled.

It was really more than they expected, and of course they were jubilant.

Josh Sheepshank stalked into the room, where every seat but the trick-chair was occupied, and Dick Dingle stood in the doorway, listening to the conversation and looking like a lamb.

"Hello, Josh!—Walk in," said he.

"Thank you; don't care if I do," he replied.

"Hello, Josh!" cried Miss Vandevere, joyously.

"Hello, Angie!—You give me ther slip tu-night."

"Why, I didn't think you were coming, on account of your lamp," said she, at which they all laughed.

"Oh, that lamp's all right, Angie."

"Got smoked glass over it, though."

"Oh, I don't mind a little thing like that," said he, going for the trick-chair.

Yes, he went for it.

He attempted to sit down in it, but it flopped over backwards, leaving him sprawling upon the floor, but quickly springing into shape and place again.

Of course there was a laugh.

Josh even tried to laugh a little himself, but it was rather a sickly attempt.

"What is the matter, Josh?" asked Angie.

"Wal, b'gosh," said he, picking himself up, "guess I didn't aim right."

"Sure you haven't been drinking?"

"Not a drop. Only bathed my eye in a little brandy."

"Sure it didn't get lower than your eye?"

"In course I am, gol darn the luck. But I reckon I'll fetch it this hitch," said he, taking great pains in his sitting down.

But again the chair went back on him, and he sprawled on the floor quite as flat as before.

And the company laughed again.

"Goldarnation! What in thunder an' greased lightning's ther matter with that cheer?" he asked, sitting up and looking at it.

This made everybody roar, and it also made Joshua mad.

He didn't try to laugh this time, but got up and began to investigate.

"Why, the gol-darned thing is luse!" said he, working the back of the chair.

"Loose!" they all asked, in seeming astonishment.

"Yes. Look at that!"

"Why, it's the trick-chair!" said Angie.

"Sure enough—so it is!" added the others.

"A trick-chair! Wal, b'gosh, I should say it was! It played tu tricks on me."

"How came it in here?" asked Dick.

"Oh, some mistake, I dare say."

"Not a gol-darned mistake! It war a pesky put-up job on me, that's what, an' I don't just like it much!" growled Josh.

"No, no, Josh; it was the stage carpenter's fault in placing it in here," said Angie.

"Oh, yes! An' I s'pose that's why none of you sot down in it!" said he, and with a growl he left the room, or started to go.

"Hold on, Josh! There's nothing the matter with this chair," said Dick, going to it and adroitly fastening a hook on the bottom, which made it as firm as any chair.

"Wal, you set in it, then."

"Why, of course I will. See!" and he threw himself into it without accident of any kind. "What's the matter with this?"

"Wal, b'gosh, I can't work it," said Dick.

"Yes you can. Try it."

Josh reluctantly tried it, and found it all right, much to his astonishment.

"What ails ther pesky thing, anyhow?" he asked, getting up to take a look at it.

As he did so, Dick slipped the hook.

"Seems all right now," he mused, and again he essayed to occupy it.

But with no better success than before.

Over he went, turning a complete somersault, amid shouts of laughter.

Dick ran to pick him up, but while doing so he again secured the chair.

"Are you hurt?" asked Angella.

"Hurt!" he growled.

"Oh, you can't manage this chair, so I'll take it," said Dick, throwing himself into it with the utmost carelessness.

Josh glanced at him for an instant, and then strode from the room, disgusted.

How they laughed.

That old trick-chair had never afforded more pleasure when in legitimate use.

Josh made his way to the prompt side, where Colonel Suckerbait stood all bewigged and dressed for his part, it being nearly time to commence.

The orchestra was playing the last bars of the overture, and the manager sent word to the greenroom for the company to be ready.

The house was well filled, and Suckerbait was feeling in fine feather—indeed, almost like going it alone—for he took all the success to himself and his wonderful play.

"Just take a peep through that hole at the house, then go to the greenroom and stay there during the performance, thanking Heaven that you have struck a big snap," said he to Josh.

"I'll shake that dufer in a few weeks if business holds this way," mused Suckerbait, as Josh retired to the greenroom. "Everybody to begin!" he called, and then "rang up."

Yes, there was a good house, and a very little "paper" in it, but the first act had not been gone

through with before it was very evident that a large number had gone there to gey the piece.

It was a paying but unruly audience, and more than once there were calls for "Josh."

Everybody behind the scenes understood it with the exception of Josh, but Suckerbait refused to admit that the play was being geyed.

And so it went on until it came to the scene where Josh had made his great hit the evening before, when there were loud calls for him. Indeed, it nearly broke Miss Vandevere up again.

But the few respectable people in front, with the assistance of the ushers and a policeman, finally put down the laughing tumult, and the play went on.

"Did you hear them calls, Josh?" asked Dick.

"Didn't I tell you that you made a hit?"

"Gol darn the hit! They must be a parcel of fules," replied Josh, indignantly.

"Oh, no. They appreciate a good thing when they see it. If they call for you at the end of the play, of course you will go out."

"Not much," said he, decidedly.

"But you must. They have come here and paid their money to see you."

"You git out. If they call for me, you go out as you did last night."

"Oh, that will never do."

But Josh didn't even want to talk on the subject, and as the end of the play approached, he sneaked out, and tried to hide himself at the back of the auditorium.

Well, the play finally came to an end; but no sooner had the curtain fallen on the last act, than the crowd began to shout for Josh.

"Josh! Josh! Josh with the black eye!"

"Josh, with the smoked lamp!"

"Josh! Josh! Josh!" and great confusion.

Dick Dingle was all ready, having made himself up with greater care than the night before, since the original was now better known, and he gave the black eye strong prominence.

Pulling aside the curtain, he went out in front of it, where he was received with a perfect hurricane of applause and laughter. Josh stood where he could see him, and was mad enough to fly, knowing the applause was in derision of his eye.

"Hello, fellows," Dick began. "I'm right glad to see you, I am, b'gosh! 'Pears like some time since I seen you last. I'm purty well, thank you; how be you'n the folks?"

"Where'd you get that eye, Josh?" some one asked.

"Wal, I had a sort of a skirmish with a blasted Britisher up here on the battle-field, an' while I war gettin' ready to spit on my hands, he up an' hit me."

said he, which produced a wild laugh, as nearly everybody knew about the occurrence.

"But I'm lookin' for him. I—I don't want to go round with only one black eye. It sorter 'tracts 'tention."

Another laugh.

"Much obleeged to you folks for comin' to see my show! Hope you won't forget me if I should ever happen around this way some more," he added, and withdrew amid applause which meant a recall.

Hastily wiping his eye, and assuming his proper self, he went out and bowed his thanks. Then, and only then, the majority knew that they had been fooled by the clever artist and personifier—Dick Dingle.

CHAPTER X.

THAT audience went away in a jolly mood, although some of them were disappointed when they found that it was not really Josh Sheepshank who had entertained them.

But some of them spotted him as they were going out, and raised such a shout that the poor fellow gladly took refuge in the box-office.

"I'll lick that Dick Dingle within an inch of his life," said he, after he had got out of sight and reach of the laughing mob. "The idee of making himself look like me with this black eye. It's tu much for human nater to bear—it is, b'gosh."

The company were loud in their applause of Dick's clever bit of business before the curtain, and even Colonel Suckerbait could not help laughing over the make-up and complete personification.

But, being anxious to count the house, he hurried out to the box-office, leaving the company to laugh and talk over the matter; Suckerbait was elated with success, and was, therefore, not so particular about Dick's pranks.

He found his indignant partner locked into the box-office, and he was reluctant even about letting him in.

But after he had stormed away a while, and threatened what he would do with Dick, the colonel said:

"Why, dear boy, that's all right."

"All right! Not by a darned sight."

"Why, anything to draw a house, you know."

"Gol darn ther houses!"

"Oh, that will never do. Good houses pay, and that's what we are after."

"Wal, it's darned mean to make fun of me on 'count of this black eye."

"Oh, pshaw! What do you care? Why, he may take me off every night if he can draw a house by doing it. You must not be sensitive, dear boy. Dick Dingle is a great artist in his way, and I am proud to have educated and brought him out. Never mind a little thing like that, for if you do, you will only get laughed at all the more. Now let us count up the house," he added.

This fortunately was a pleasant piece of business, as it had been the night before, and amid the clinking of silver and the fluff of bank-notes, Josh's indignation was soon drowned.

That was the last night in Trenton, and preparations were to be made for an early start the next morning, for they were to take a big jump from there

to Norristown, Pa., where they had been advertised for a week's stand.

Dick Dingle kept out of Sheepshank's sight until the next morning, when he was sure that his wrath had abated, and even then they were both too busy to talk or think much about what had been.

But Josh had no notion of riding in the baggage-car this trip.

If he was in successful communication with himself, he had had all of that sort of sport that he longed for.

And as for Angella's trunks, they would have to take their chances with the others. He was not ambitious to watch them any more.

So he told his bewitching charmer that he intended to share a seat with her on the road this time.

"What!" she exclaimed.

"I'm goin' to bea you all ther way," said he, with a big grin.

"You are?"

"In course I be."

"Well, I reckon not," she said, indignantly.

"Hey?"

"Not if my mental apparatus is in its accustomed working order."

"What do you mean, Angie?" he asked, looking at her in surprise.

"Not with that smoked lamp of yours."

"Ah! B'gosh! I'd forgot all 'bout that."

"Well, then, it shows that you haven't fooled around a looking-glass much lately."

"But what am I tu do, Angie? Ther darned thing's black. Hew be I goin' to get it white agin?"

"Why, go and have it painted."

"Painted?"

"Yes. Kalsomined."

"Grut gosh!"

"Whitewashed."

"Oh, thunder!"

"Fixed up somehow. You don't think I'd ride in the same seat with you if you had box ticket, do you?"

"Box ticket?"

"Well, it reminds me of a coupon for a box—or a boxing-match—and I guess everybody else would think so. Get thee to a painter," she added, tragically.

"House-painter?"

"No, animal-painter," said she, laughing, but he never tumbled.

"Where'll I find one?"

"Ask Dick."

"Oh, Dick be hanged!"

"Well, go find one yourself, then."

Josh walked away in a thoughtful mood; but when he came to think of it he could hardly blame her for not wanting to publicly associate with a man having such a forbidding testimonial, and so he set out in search of an animal-painter, there being yet an hour or more to spare before the train went.

He walked along the street for quite a ways with out seeing any sign indicating an animal-painter, but he finally came upon the shop of a sign-painter.

"Maybe this chap paints animals," he mused, and rousing entered the place.

The painter's apprentice was there, but the boss was somewhere else.

That apprentice had been to the show the night before, and recognized Josh the moment he entered, and came very near laughing in his face.

"What did he want there, anyway?"

"Say, you do you paint animals here?" he asked, looking around.

"Yes, sir, paint anything, from a castle in the air to a humming-bird," said apprentice, briskly.

"Wal, I arn't a castle in the air nor I arn't a humming-bird, b'gosh, but I'd like to get that eye painted, so to look a little more natural," said he, pointing to it.

"All right, sir, I can fix you up. Fixed three already this morning. Take a seat while I prepare some color," said he, pointing to a stool, upon which Josh dropped himself.

"I run agin' the edge of a door last night in the dark," said he, for an excuse.

"Oh, yes, sir. More black eyes come from that cause than any other. People will be so careless with their eyes."

"Yes," added Josh, never for an instant thinking that he was guying him.

"Sometimes black eyes come from cutting up kindling-wood, but the majority of them are occasioned by running against doors or something," he added, while mixing color.

"Wal, now, sorter hurry up, for I've got to catch ther ten o'clock cars."

"All right. Plenty of time. It will only take me a few moments after I get ready."

"Yes; but before you get ready it might be time for ther cars."

"No; you have got twenty minutes yet," said the fellow, approaching him with a little sponge saturated with something.

"What's that?"

"Ammonia, to remove the grease from the skin, so that the color will adhere," and he began to sop him in the eye with it.

"Hold on! That hurts, b'gosh!"

"But only for a moment, sir. It has to be done, as a part of the process."

"Gol darn ther process!" cried Josh, rubbing his smarting eye.

"It will soon be over, and be much better than carrying around a black eye, for most people are so uncharitable, you know, that they would have it that somebody hit you, instead of believing that you ran against the edge of a door in the dark."

"That's so, I s'pose; but it smarta."

"Ah, my dear sir, remember the old saying—no smart, no cure."
 "Wal, hurry up; it's darned near time for them cars."
 "Oh, lots of time yet. Only be patient until the ammonia dries a bit."
 "Wal, how long is it goin' to smart this way?"
 "Only a moment."
 "But I can't open my darned eye."
 "That will be all right presently, sir," and he fanned him a moment, as if to help the drying process.
 "It beats Sam Patch how that smart!"

But Josh heeded them not. His business was to catch that train, and get a seat by the side of his charmer; and so he let out all the reefs there were in his running gear, and whooped her for all he was worth, but creating an unmistakable sensation as he went.

Just in the nick of time he reached the depot, and even when he entered the gate the train was just moving away.

But he caught on. That is to say, he caught on to the hand-rail of the last car, but so out of breath was he that he could not leap upon the step, and finally fell down, still hanging on, and was being

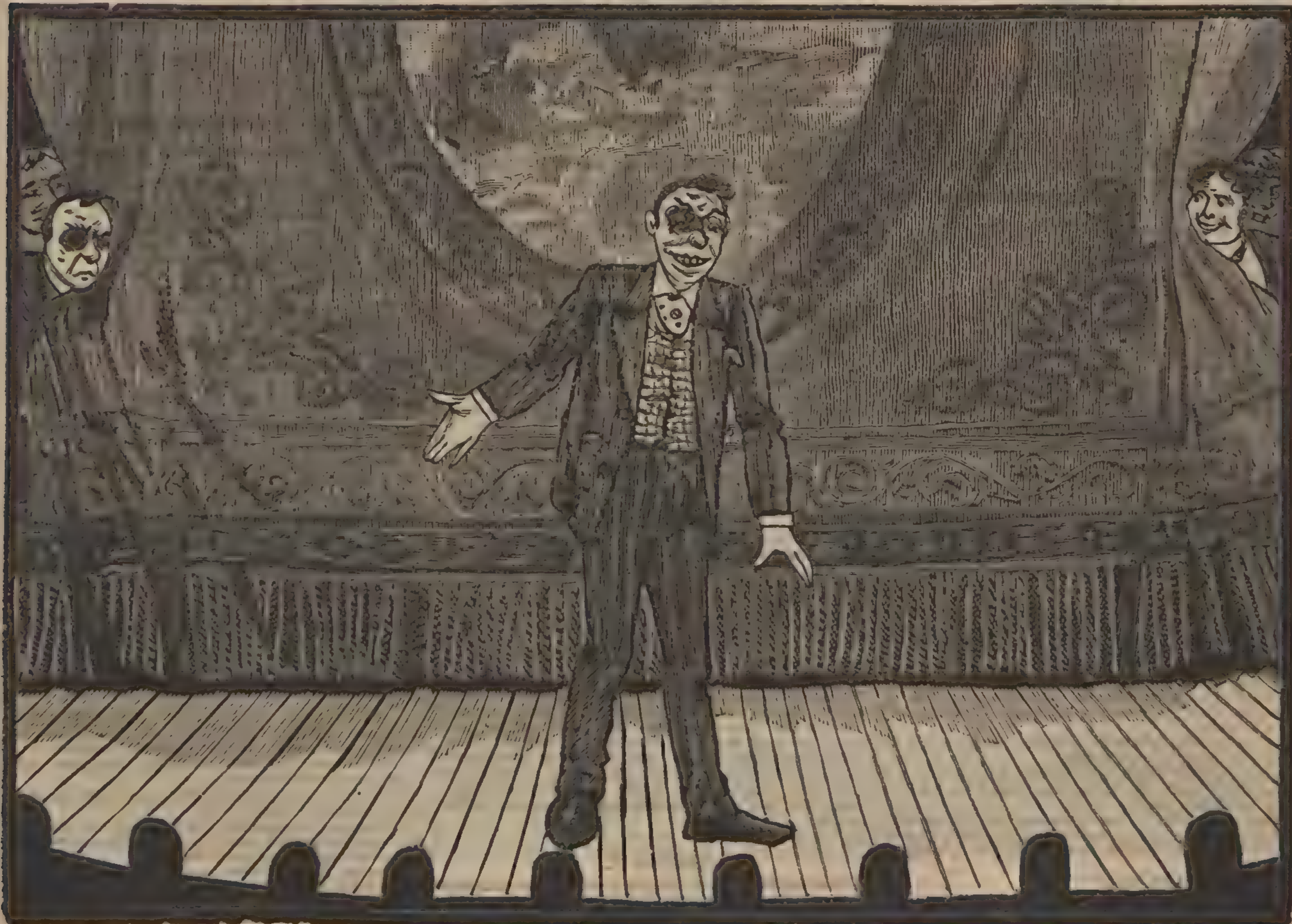
"All right, come down with it," replied the brakeman, releasing him, and Josh was not long in responding.

"Now let me into these gol-darned cars. It's a darned skin, anyhow," said Josh.

"All right, if you don't consider your life worth more than five dollars," said the man, opening the car door and allowing him to enter.

"Gol darn my sister's cat's tail, if this don't beat all natur," he growled. "You can't draw a square breath without havin' to pay for it."

And then, all bare-headed as he was, with a wild look and a wilder-looking eye, he began to make his



Josh stood where he could see him, and was mad enough to fly. "Hello, fellers," Dick began. "I'm right glad to see yu, I am, b'gosh! Pears like some time since I seen yu last. I'm purty well, thank yu; how be yu'n the folks?"

"Oh, yes! but it is eating up all the grease in your skin, so that the colors will take a good hold and adhere until the natural color of the skin returns."

"But hurry up."

"All right. Now I am about to apply the artificial color. It is a trifle darker than the natural skin, but exposure to the air for five minutes will change it so that your most intimate friend would not know it from the natural skin."

"Wal, go ahead," said he, fidgeting.

That was of an apprentice did go ahead. That was his business, and whether it was or not, he made it his business to paint all around that shady eye with indigo blue, in which a few grains of yellow had been judiciously mixed.

Neither was he particular about confining himself to the blackened space, but enlarged upon it, holding him under his artistic manipulations until he had barely time to catch the train.

"There you are, sir, and by the time you reach the depot, which, by the way, you have just got time to do if you hurry, it will have dried and made amends perfectly for the blackness surrounding your eye. One dollar, if you please," he added, holding out his hand.

Josh paid him and started on a run for the depot, while that artistic apprentice watched him with a gradually enlarging grin.

But the smart had not yet gone away, and Josh was obliged to close the hospital eye and depend upon the other one as he rushed wildly on to catch the train.

This state of affairs was, of course, not pleasant, and being thus optically handicapped, he ran into several persons, and made things generally lively for other pedestrians.

Some of them yelled after him, calling him a lunatic, a dromedary, a cow, while one or two into whom he had run invited him cordially to come back and be kicked.

dragged along in a most dangerous attitude, when a brakeman seized him by the coat-collar and snatched him out of danger.

But in doing so, he snatched the collar from his coat, and lost his hat.

"What's the matter with you, anyhow?" demanded the brakeman, after Josh had been stood upon his feet against the car door.

"Matter! What's ther matter with yu, gol darn yu're picter! Look at my coat," said he, savagely.

"Well, hadn't you rather have a tailor hold an inquest over your coat than a coroner over your mangled remains?"

"But where's my hat?" he demanded, and by this time the train was well under way.

"Oh, you got out from under that."

"Wal, stop her; stop the darned cars."

"Oh, we'll stop in about ten miles, and then you can go back after it."

"Wal, I think you're gosh-darned mean, anyhow."

"What, for saving your life? Now, look here, young man with the bright blue eye, I want a five-case note out of you for this business."

"What business—tearin' my coat and losin' my hat?" demanded Josh, hotly.

"Yes, and for saving your life. Come down, or off you go."

"What?"

"I'm boss of this end of the train, and five dollars is the least I ever take for saving idiots who are belated, and who grab for the last instead of the inner hand-rail. Come down."

"I shan't do it."

"Then off you go."

"But I've got my ticket."

"And I want my five-case scrip. I'm no man to be trifled with," said he, seizing Josh by the neck.

Josh remembered his other involuntary leap from a dying car, and he weakened.

"Hold on—here's yure money!" he called,

way through the train for the purpose of finding the company.

But he had to go through two before he found his friends, and then they received him with a grand laugh or looks of astonishment.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded Sucker-bait, looking him over.

"Come near gettin' left, an' lost my hat."

"But your coat?"

"A chap pulled me on by it, an' arter tearin' it, charged me five dollars for savin' my life."

"It was too much."

"That war what I told him, but he said he would throw me off if I didn't pay him, an' so I did, just to save trouble," replied Josh.

At this the company could hold in no longer, but let themselves out for a big laugh.

Miss Vandevere had told them how he had gone to get his eye painted, and they saw that he had undoubtedly met an artist.

Miss Vandevere laughed so much louder than the others that it attracted his notice, and so he went and took a seat beside her.

"Mercy, mercy! Go away—go away!" she cried.

"You are crazy."

"That's so, Angie; crazy in love with yu."

"Go away, for mercy's sake. What will people think?"

"But don't be so bashful, Angie."

"Bashful! Mercy on us! take a look at yourself."

"What's ther matter?"

"Look and see. Where did you get painted?"

"Up here to a paint-shop."

"Well, I should say so! Go look at yourself in the mirror there, and then go die!"

Josh obeyed reluctantly, while the whole company and other passengers laughed.

He took a surprised look at himself, and especially at his eye.

"Gosh darn that fellow! he said as how it would turn flesh-color in a few minutes!" he growled.

"Oh, that's all right; give it time," said Dick Dingle, ready to burst with laughter.

"But it's gettin' dry an' hard."

"It has to do that before it changes color."

Josh looked appealingly at Colonel Suckerbait.

"Go and wash it off," said he, "before it gets dry."

"But I paid the darned cuss a dollar for it."

"All right; then you are a dollar out, besides being fooled."

Another laugh, during which Josh looked even more foolish than ever.

"Oh, you keep right on, and they will ruin you," said Suckerbait. "It doesn't seem to do you any good to warn you. You are no sooner out of one scrape than you are into another. I'm getting sick."

"Well, if you're gettin' sick, what do you think of me, b'gosh? Angie, this is all your fault," he added, reproachfully.

"I told you to go and get your eye painted flesh-color, but somebody has played a trick on you and painted it indigo-blue," said she, laughing.

"It is your own fault, Josh. If you are such a confounded jay as to let everybody fool you like that, don't blame anybody else. Go and wash yourself," said the disgusted colonel.

Josh went to the wash-room of the car, and there tried to work it off with soap and water, but all in vain. The more he rubbed, the more it remained, and the more soap he got in his eyes.

Finally he gave up and sat down in disgust, calling himself all the bad names he could think of—ready to pay a man handsomely to kill him.

"Dick, take him off at Philadelphia. Go with him to get a new hat and coat, and find somebody who will fix him up. For Heaven's sake, don't play any more tricks on him," said the colonel.

"All right," and at Philadelphia he took him from the train, hired a cab, and drove with him to a clothing-store, while the remainder of the party went on their way, laughing.

What, for goodness' sake, would happen him next? They joined the company two or three hours later, when Josh was looking as well as ever, only he wasn't feeling just as well.

He was spending too much money for clothes, especially hats, of late, and it seemed to him that everything that happened for the worse fell to his lot.

Dick Dingle had got him all right once more, and had given him some good advice, but after all, he was afraid to move, for fear something would fall on him.

If this was show business, he concluded that he had a pretty bad show, and if this was the only way of making money, he wanted to go back with the little he had left, and spend the remainder of his life on the farm. No such misfortunes ever happened him there, which showed that there was where he belonged.

The first night in Norristown was a good one, the big advertising drawing a paying house, and what interested Josh even more, his charmer consented to eat oysters at his expense after the show.

The second night was not so good; in fact, did not pay expenses.

Suckerbait was sullen. He stood dressed for his part at the prompter's desk, having been on for his first scene, and was watching the development of the play with anxiety, resolved that he would carry the house by storm in his next scene.

It was warm where he stood, and he took off his big wig and placed it on the table, so that he could put it on at a moment's notice.

He was playing the heavy villain, it will be remembered, and his next scene was where he rushed wildly on to denounce the hero.

Dick Dingle thought he saw a chance for some fun, and so, bending a pin into a hook, he attached it to a yard or two of black thread, and fastened the other end to a hook just behind where the colonel stood.

This done, he hooked the pin into the wig, and then stole softly around to the opposite side, where he stood to watch proceedings.

Presently Suckerbait caught up the wig and placed it on his head without observing the string; and, after glancing at himself in the glass, got his "cue," and rushed madly upon the stage, shouting:

"Hal! I have found the rascal out!"

But his wig stayed behind, dangling to the thread, allowing the other part of his mug make-up to show badly.

The audience roared at his confusion.

Rushing back he snatched the wig, pulled it on, and returned to the stage before the laughing had subsided.

But wasn't he mad, though!

CHAPTER XL

Yes, Colonel Suckerbait was very, very mad on account of his losing his wig in the awkward manner he did.

But he managed to get through with his part all right, after which he tried to find out for a certainty—always suspecting Dick Dingle, of course—who had put the job up on him.

This was the second night at Norristown, and the house was neither very good nor enthusiastic, so that the prospect for the third and succeeding nights of the week's stay was not very riotous in the right direction.

Something had to be done, for it was very evident that "The Chump's Bride" would not draw on its own account. Indeed, everybody in the company, with the exception of Suckerbait and Africanus Muff, knew that the piece was a bad one, and would never draw a person for the second time, or draw a compliment or good word that would induce others to go.

Again, it was a mistake on the part of the advance

agent, hiring the theater for six nights, instead of three at most, but the wildly enthusiastic Suckerbait had told him such big stories of how the people were crazy for the play and complained because of their short stops. So he ventured to stand them a week at Norristown, generally regarded as a good show town.

And there they were, with a mighty poor prospect of a good house, and so something had to be done, although Joshua Sheepshank, the moneyed partner of the concern, thought little about the matter. Indeed, he knew but little about it and cared but little, so long as Miss Vandevere smiled on him.

But Colonel Suckerbait knew very well that something had to be done, and after arranging it so that complimentary tickets would fill the house respectably for the third night, he consulted with Miss Vandevere as to the remaining nights.

"Well, colonel," said she, "the fact of the matter is, you should not have engaged to play here a week."

"I know it. Confound that Joe Bowers! he should have known better. I'll telegraph him a blowing up," replied Suckerbait.

And stepping out of the parlor where they were, he went to the telegraph office and wrote the following message to the advance agent:

"Don't arrange for one week again."

"SUCKERBAIT."

Now that was all very well as written, paid for, and handed to the operator. But that gay and festive operator was ogling a pretty girl outside, and doing his level best to flatten and unjoint her so far as any other fellow in the whole world was concerned, and he took up the message as Suckerbait turned to rejoin Miss Vandevere.

Consider that young man's nerves and what eyesight he had left for the coarse calls of business!

He never noticed the first and most important word of the message, or if he had, he would probably have made it "Baby" or "Darling," or something like that, and so he sent it thus:

"Arrange for one week again."

"SUCKERBAIT."

And the advance agent took unto himself marrow a great deal, and yanked the kinks out of his spine, and the corrugations vanished from his brow, because he thought he had done well in making a week's stand at Norristown, by which an extra bale of greenbacks would be gathered in, and he at once set himself to work that he might make a second hit by striking another good town for a week.

After sending this message the manager went back to his stellar attraction.

Miss Vandevere was privileged to do and say about what she liked, and nature had endowed her with nerve enough to grasp the situation.

"Colonel, this play of 'The Chump's Wife' is a very bad one," said she, when he returned.

"What! What is that you say, Angie?" asked the author and manager, looking at her.

"A very bad one," she said again.

"Why do you say so, Angie?"

"Because everybody else says so."

The colonel bit his lip, but replied not.

"Big billing brings them in the first night, but they often buy the play even then, because they can make neither head nor tail of it. But whenever you attempt to give it a second or third night, you know the result. The company knows it as well as I do, but they haven't the nerve to come right up and tell you so."

"Well, what shall be done?"

"Fix the play up."

"How?"

"Into some semblance of reason and human probability and consistency. Make more of Dick Dingle's part and less of your own. He is making the hits, and you should give him more scope. I can show you how to cut down the piece and make it better. We have all talked it over repeatedly."

"The dence you have!"

"Yes, we are getting tired of being guded."

"But the piece goes well enough," said he.

"Oh, yes, it goes well enough, until the last curtain, and then people ask each other what the dickens it is all about. The name is bad. Leave the 'Chumps' off, and call it 'The Bride.' It will be all the better for it. 'Chump' is slang, and begins to be known as such. Drop it, is my advice, and make the last act a little more intelligible," said she, with some earnestness.

"Why haven't you said so before?"

"Well, I wanted to see how it worked."

"All right, Angie; we will fix it up together so as to present it in its improved form, to-morrow night. But how about to-night?"

"Guess you'll have to pay it, colonel," said she, with a pretty laugh.

"Well, but I can't make it all paper."

"But that will be the safest way, and so far as the remaining nights are concerned, you ought to put on a farce—'Box and Cox,' 'Swiss Swains,' 'The Widow's Victim.' Why, that would be just the thing for Dick! Make it an afterpiece for 'The Bride,' and I'll do a part in it, if needs be," she added, earnestly.

The colonel was silent and thoughtful. He had supposed he knew it all, but this young lady was certainly giving him points.

"I think Dick is 'up' in 'Jeremy Clap,' and if he is, we can put it on with one rehearsal, and get out some big bills for him, you know."

"Yes, I like the idea. But we can't get it on before Friday night, and here are two nights to worry through until then. Now this is the question—how can we do it?"

"Afraid you will have to work the 'snow-storm,'" said she, laughing.

To understand the term "snow-storm" properly, as used in theatrical parlance, it must be known that imitation snow on the stage is made of fine-cut paper. Free tickets is also called "papering" a house, and so when a manager wants to get up a snow scene, it is said that he takes the "paper" that comes into the house for that purpose.

"But I have got a better idea," suggested Suckerbait.

"What is it?"

"An old snap in a new guise."

"What is it like unto?"

"Will you help work it, Angie?"

"Why, of course I will. I'll do anything to fill the house," said she, quickly.

"All right, we can do it. Hush! We must talk low," said he, looking around. "I have got it all arranged with a reporter for the *Herald*. You take a man's black wig to your room with you to-night, and after you get there, you scream, do some romantic tragedy business, as though there was a robber in your room, call for help; we will all rush up to your room to the rescue, where we must find you in a fine attitude, with this wig in your hand, and looking intently out of the window as though at the retreating robber, whom you have snatched bald-headed."

"Excellent!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in delight.

"I will have an old hat lying under the window that will seem as though it belongs to the escaped robber, and you shall be the heroine of a midnight adventure."

"Splendid!"

"You can say that you caught him in your room riding your trunk; that you screamed and closed with him, but that his superior strength enabled him to get away from you, but that you retained his wig. See?"

"Well, I should say so. Have it written up?"

"Leave that to me. You will see yourself the heroine of a great story in the paper."

"All right. I'll go up at once," said she.

"Wait a moment, until I throw the hat down."

"But there is Sheepshank out there waiting to get me alone, the nuisance!" said she, and looking up, Suckerbait saw him standing there.

"Oh, I'll take care of him, never fear," and going from the room, he sent Josh on some errand or other just to get him out of the way.

This was the colonel's little game. Nobody but Miss Vandevere knew anything about it, with the exception of the reporter, who had worked up several such snaps—such as the loss of diamonds by star actresses—just for the sake of getting their names into the papers and letting the world know what valuable diamonds they had. But this laid away over anything he had ever helped work up before, and he felt certain of making a hit for his paper—and his pocket.

Well, in a few moments everything was arranged, and Miss Angelia Vandevere went to her room.

The other members of the combination were standing around in various places, and everything was both peaceful and lovely.

Josh Sheepshank returned from the errand Suckerbait had sent him on just as Angelia had left for her room, and naturally he felt very much put out. He wanted to have a talk with her before she retired, and he would have even taken her out and treated her again if he only had the opportunity.

Presently there was a wild, dramatic yell from Miss Vandevere's room, accompanied by sounds of a struggle and a cry for help.

Everybody started, and a rush was made in answer to the call. Company, hotel clerk and porters—all ran wildly to the room.

There stood the actress by the window, out of which she was looking, holding the wig in her hand, and crying out for somebody to stop him.

It was a rare stage-picture, and showed that Miss Vandevere was a capital actress.

Of course, everybody wanted to know what the matter was, Josh Sheepshank especially, and so soon as she could collect herself sufficiently, she told the astonished crowd about how she came into her room and found a robber overhauling her trunk; how she screamed and grappled with him; how they struggled; but he, being the stronger, managed to get away and escape by the window, while she clutched him by the hair of the head, as she thought, and only succeeded in securing the fellow's wig.

Great excitement instantly followed, and several ran out to see if they could get on the track of the robber. They found his hat beneath the window whence he had escaped, but all further trace of him was lost in the darkness.

The reporter was on hand to do his duty, and Josh Sheepshank wanted to fight. He even volunteered to lie in front of her chamber door that night, for fear the robber might come back again—that the lightning might strike in the same place.

There certainly was much excitement in and around the hotel, and much curiosity was manifested to see the wig which the beautiful heroine had secured as a trophy of her midnight encounter, and Colonel Suckerbait took it to the hotel office, where it became the center of attraction; and he told the story over and over again to admiring throngs.

To himself he thought it the neatest bit of work he had ever planned, and Angelia Vandevere was certainly one of the greatest actresses on the boards.

Even then his company didn't know what a hit it was, but all felt glad that Angie had got out of it all right, and complimented her on the pluck she had shown in the matter.

Josh felt that it was his duty to watch either before her door or under her window, and would have done so, had not the colonel laughed at the idea, and told him to go to bed.

"B'gosh, that's what I call putty sarcy," said he, speaking to Dick Dingle, after the affair was over.

"Yes, it was so," replied Dick, quietly.

"I've a darned good mind to keep watch," he added, glancing around.

"What for?"

"Why, to catch that chap if he comes back arter his wig an' hat."

"Good scheme," replied Dick, seriously.

"Would yu du it?"

"Why, of course I would."

"But ther colonel told me not tu."

"All right. Do as you like. But if you should dis-

"Never saw you before in the whole course of my life that I know of."

"Why, I'm Josh Sheepshank."

"What! What are you giving me? Do you suppose my boss is a negro? Take him away."

"Yea, run him in."

"Come along here," growled the officer, taking a firmer grip on his collar.

"Stop it, I tell yu! I'm disguised. I'm—"

"Come on, or I'll kick the lungs out of yer," roared the officer, yanking him.

"It was just his luck."

many rackets he had had at the expense of the Vermonter, who was so deeply stuck on the lovely Miss Vandevere—the cause of all his troubles on this occasion.

But Dick had not yet been let into the hat, wig, and burglary dodge.

So far as he knew, it was all regular and above-board, although he had often heard of similar jobs being put up for advertising purposes, and yet, this one was so dramatic in all its details it seemed to be genuine.

Well, the next day's *Herald* did the business beautifully.



"It is a trifle darker than the natural skin, but exposure to the air for five minutes will change it so that your most intimate friend would not know it from the natural skin." "Wal, go ahead," said he, fidgeting. That wag of an apprentice did go ahead.

guise yourself a little, you could hang around without his knowing you."

"That's so, b'gosh," and away he started to his room to disguise himself.

Dick winked to himself, and then winked to the night clerk. Then they swapped winks.

When everything was in readiness, it was found that Josh had painted his face so that the colonel would not know him if he happened to come along, and had hidden himself in a closet in the entry, not far from Miss Vandevere's chamber door.

He had been here about ten minutes, waiting for that burglar to return for his hat and wig, when two stout porters pounced upon him like turkeys on a grasshopper.

"Here's the thief!"

"Give it to him!" and they banged him around after hustling him out of his concealment, and made it so lively for him, that he thought himself in the midst of a cyclone.

They yanked him down-stairs into the office most ungently, and there handed him over to a waiting officer.

"Gol darn your picters, what in thunder be yu tryin' tu du? Don't yu know me?" he demanded, as soon as they gave him a chance to speak.

"Of course we know you. You are a thief, and we caught you at business."

"Here, Dick—come here!" he called, seeing that sober joker approach. "Make 'em stop."

"Stop what?" asked Dick, with indifference.

"This 'restin' me."

"It's no funeral of mine."

"But yu know all about it."

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," replied Dick, turning on his heel.

"What! Du yu pretend tu say yu don't know me?" demanded Josh, indignantly.

They took him to the station-house and locked him up, where Dick Dingle soon afterwards appeared.

After he and the officer in charge, together with the night clerk of the hotel, had laughed the matter over a little while, Dick was given the key of Josh's cell, and the night clerk returned to his duties, leaving only one man in the station-house.

Dick went down to Josh's cell and cautiously unlocked the door.

"Why, is this really you, Josh?" he whispered.

"In course it is, rot blast it," said Josh.

"Hush! Don't speak above a whisper. I found the officer in charge asleep in his chair, and I stole the key of your cell. Now, wash your face and sneak out after me, and no one will know you even if they do see you. But you want to go right to bed the moment you strike the hotel. Hush!" and with his finger on his lips, doing a nice bit of acting in pantomime, Dick withdrew.

Josh Sheepshank was not long in washing the color from his face and following him on tiptoe.

Reaching the office, the man in charge appeared to be asleep, and Josh sneaked out. And what suddenly imprinted tracks he made for that hotel!

Dick and the clerk were waiting for him.

"Now, skip right to bed," said Dick, "and lay low."

"All right, Dick; but don't say a word about ther darned scrape tu ther colonel, for he'd be sure tu lart at me."

"All right, but be more careful next time."

"Bet yu're bates I will," said he, going up-stairs to his room.

Then that night clerk and Dick Dingle shook hands enthusiastically, and turned something into a pair of glasses. Night clerks often do that when they feel real tickled about something.

Dick sat up with him an hour or so longer, during which, in the absence of business, he told him of the

There was fully half a column devoted to the attempted robbery of Miss Vandevere, "the beautiful star of the magnificent combination now performing here under the management of Colonel Suckerbait."

And then it went on to give the particulars so far as could be learned, but dwelt with tenderness almost equal to heroic blank-verse on the very dramatic situation in her chamber when her calls and the noise of her struggles with the robber brought a crowd of friends to her chamber. The account continued:

"The burly ruffian was of course too strong for the beautiful little woman to restrain, even after she had pluckily grappled with him. He broke away and escaped by the window, but, before he had time to do so, she again caught him by the hair of the head, as she supposed. But it proved to be a wig that he wore, and the heroic lady retained it in her determined grasp, and was holding it when assistance entered her invaded chamber. She retains the wig as a trophy, together with a wrenched wrist and one or two slight contusions, which, however, will not prevent her from appearing in her finely personified character this evening."

"A hat was also found under her window, and the police hope to use both that and the wig as clues to the identity of the robber. Altogether, it was a daring piece of business, and had the intended victim of it been less courageous than Miss Vandevere proved herself to be, there is no knowing what the result might have been."

That reporter was a genius, and so both Suckerbait and Miss Vandevere regarded him.

The result was that it was the talk of the town, and the beautiful star was the heroine of whom all were talking, which of course pleased her quite as much as it did her manager.

Josh Sheepshank had but little to say about the matter, fearing that his part in it might get out and the laugh go up at his expense. But he was not par-

ticularly happy at seeing her receive the congratulations of the handsome bucks about town, who could not seem to do her honor enough.

But that night the house was packed to the doors, and an old rusty sign—"Standing Room Only"—was fished out of the lumber-room and stood up at the door, where it had not been seen before in years.

The heroine was received with a perfect ovation of applause and flowers, and nobody stopped to think how bad the play was, so long as she stood before them—bright, beautiful and brave.

In the last act she woke the house to a tremendous pitch of enthusiasm by wearing the wig at her belt, like a triumphant Indian chief, and so the performance closed, only to bring her before the curtain twice again to receive the applause and homage of her admirers.

It was a great triumph for Suckerbait, but Josh Sheepshank was mad.

CHAPTER XII.

"MISS VANDEVERE, you are a great actress," said Colonel Suckerbait, as he led her from before the curtain the last time on her recall, in honor of the robbery event at the hotel.

"I know it; and you ought to raise my salary," said she, laughing.

"Oh, hush, my dear! I have all I can do to raise it now. But don't say a word; I will fix something lowly for you yet. That was the biggest snap ever worked. Don't say a word; at all events, not until we get out of Norristown, for it would kill us both."

"All right. I'm not apt to give good things away," said she, laughing.

"Right you are; and to-night we will work over this play as you spoke of. Dick Dingle is up in the part of *Jeremy Clip*. We'll have a rehearsal of the 'Widow's Victim' in the morning, and announce it for an afterpiece to-night," said he.

"All right," and she started to hurry away, followed by Josh Sheepshank, loaded with bouquets which had been thrown to her during the evening.

"Wal, you took 'um tu-night, Angie, you did, b'gosh," said he, after reaching her chamber and placing the flowers on a table.

"Oh, yes; I catch on once in a while," said she, throwing aside her wraps.

"You're a darnation smart gal, an' I'm proud enough on you, b'gosh."

"That's all right."

"In course it is. That 'ar robbery business was a great card for you, Angie."

"Yes, so it proved. But what is this I hear about your being somehow mixed up in it?" she asked, looking at him with a smile.

"Me?" he asked, in surprise, for he didn't think Dick had given it away.

"Yes, you. How was it?"

"Who said I was mixed up in it?"

"I heard some of the servants laughing about it at lunch-time."

"Wal, now, Angie, I'll tell you just how that war," said he, going to close the door.

"Hold on! Don't close the door," said she, earnestly.

"Why not?" he asked, looking astonished.

"Because it is too late, and I am going to retire."

"Wal, Angie, it's only me."

"I can't help it. You don't wish to set people to talking about me, do you?"

"In course not. But don't they know that we're courtin'?" he asked.

"I hardly think they do."

"Wal, but you do."

"No, sir. I know nothing of the kind," said she, decidedly.

"What, Angie?"

"No, sir. It is bad enough to have a midnight burglar in my room, let alone a midnight lover. No, Josh, you must go right away."

"But I was goin' to tell you 'bout that scrape."

"No, I am too tired to-night. Go and tell it to Colonel Suckerbait."

"Thunder!" said he, under his breath, for that was the very individual above all others whom he did not wish to have a knowledge of it.

"Now go right away, please," she said, in a way that would have started most fellows.

"But we're courtin', arn't we?"

"Not to-night, at all events."

"But as a general thing we be, arn't we?"

"I don't know but that we are, for, as a general thing, you are in some scrape or other," said she, laughing.

"Guess that's so, b'gosh," he mused. "But it's most generally on you're account, Angie."

"Well, then, I should think common sense would teach you to avoid me."

"I can't do it, Angie. I'm clean dead gone onto you, I am, b'gosh. I don't more'n half sleep on you're account."

"Oh, pehaw! Don't be a goose," said she, impatiently.

"Wal, I am a guse, an' I can't help it. Never felt so much like a darned goslin' in my hull life as I do when I'm where you be. Now—"

"Now it's time for geese to be asleep. Go."

"But you don't go back on me, do you?"

"In what way?"

"You don't say we arn't courtin', do you?"

"Not steadily, Josh."

"Wal, I should say not. At all events, it makes me feel mighty unsteady all the time, b'gosh."

"Oh, your ballast has shifted. Better reload and see if you can't get on an even keel. Good-night," she added, shoving him towards the door.

"Wal, give me a kiss then?"

"Not any."

"What?"

"There's my hand," she said, offering it.

Josh seized and smacked it three or four times, and seemed to want to take it along with him. But she finally got rid of him, and he made his way sorrowfully to his own room.

"Gol darn my old maid aunt's off turkey, if this arn't gettin' down to pretty fine nibbles, when you have to kiss you're gal's hand," he muttered.

"There more she gets made of the more she don't make much of me, b'gosh. I'm darned 'fraid they'll spill her; get her so darned stuck up that she won't look at nothin' short of a lord. But I'm goin' to have her if it rips off the last gallus-button—I am, b'gosh," he added, and then went to bed, not to sleep, but to speculate.

And to think occasionally of the old folks at home.

He wrote to them, and got letters from them now and then, and while he painted highly-colored pictures of his prospects, they somehow got the notion into their heads that he was among sharks, who would leave him high and dry after they had got his money all away from him.

Indeed, Dolly Dimple, the buxom country girl whom they wished him to marry, had been to New York since the combination had been on the road, and had learned enough to satisfy her that he was engaged in an enterprise that would take all his money and give none back, and for this reason his parents had besought him to return with what he had left, marry Dolly Dimple, and settle down like a man and a farmer, as nature intended him to be.

Dolly had lately inherited three or four thousand dollars from a maiden aunt in New York.

She had a mind to follow him, but her pride got the best of her, now that she was rich, and hearing that Josh was head over heels in love with one of the actresses of the company, she got indignant, and returned home with the report that set his parents to worrying. And yet, in spite of herself, she couldn't get over her "goneness" for Joshua Sheepshank.

"Dolly Dimple!" he would say, after reading his mother's letter. "Marry Dolly Dimple! Wal, I should sorter pucker up my laughing apparatus! Dolly Dimple! She's a healthy short-cake for me to marry! How would she look 'longside of my Angie? Oh, I'll make her feel bilious when I take Angie up there as my wife, an' I'm bettin' on it! No green country girl for me! Wonder what Dolly'd say if she only seen her on the stage once? Guess she'd think she hadn't much shine. Dolly's good 'nough sort of a gal for a farmer's wife, but I'm in the show business, an' want a showy wife, b'gosh!"

This was his idea of it.

What other people's ideas were on the subject, and especially ambitious Miss Vandevere's, was quite another thing.

But to return to the combination.

That third night at Norristown was a great success, and put more money into the treasury than ever got there before.

"He that's robbed, not wanting what is stolen. Let him not know't and he's not robbed at all."

It's the same way with being humbugged.

If a person eats chalk for cheese and don't know the difference, is there any?

Well, not much, to the eater.

And so it was with the good people of Norristown. They had been beautifully humbugged; but, so long as they did not know it, why, they took genuine pleasure in honoring the supposed heroine, and in paying money to do it.

The next day Colonel Suckerbait saw an opportunity of "keeping up the shake" a while longer, and so he placed the wig in a prominent shop-window, with this tag to it:

The wig snatched from the head of the midnight robber by Miss Vandevere.

And there was a curious crowd around it all day, it proving a good advertisement.

That night "The Bride" was announced with the laughable afterpiece, "The Widow's Victim," with Dick Dingle as *Jeremy Clip*, the stage-struck barber, with imitations.

The result was another full house, and a great hit for Dick.

The farce was well known, but Dick compared even more than favorably with the many others they had seen play it.

And of course he received the hearty congratulations of the company as well as the public, and especially was Miss Vandevere enthusiastic in her praises of the youngster, predicting for him a brilliant future.

Indeed, she was so full of it that Sheepshank got exceedingly jealous, although Dick was little more than a boy.

But he was keen enough to see that she worshiped success, especially when it was out of her line, and while temporarily under a cloud, he almost made up his mind to adopt the stage himself, in the hope of making a hit, so that she would be also in love with him.

The last nights at Norristown were bad. The theater-going public had seen all, and more too, than there was in the great combination, and they failed to respond towards the last.

The consequence was that they lost money, although coming out altogether about even on account of the midnight robbery snap.

They played three or four one and two night stands, and finally brought up at the smoky city of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Here the advance agent had again made his mark by engaging the Opera House for a week, greatly to

Suckerbait's disgust, who at once wrote him for an explanation.

In reply, the agent forwarded him his telegram from Norristown.

That settled it, and after clubbing himself for half an hour, Suckerbait both wrote and telegraphed to him—"Don't make any more six-night stands," and at once set himself to work to contrive how he should manage to make a full week's business pay expenses.

The play was, of course, a great deal better after it had been fixed up (for it could not have been worse), and called "The Bride," instead of "The Chump's Bride," but there was at least not enough in it for more than two nights, even with "The Widow's Victim" as an afterpiece for the second night, and the prospect looked equally.

Meantime, Josh Sheepshank had opened his heart to Dick Dingle relative to his going upon the stage as a professional, and asked his advice as to the best line of business.

"Tragedy, by all means, my dear sir," said Dick, with great earnestness.

"Do you mean it, Dick?" he asked.

"Of course I do. There are only two or three good tragedians left on the stage now, and a new one would be welcomed heartily. There is both fame and money in it, Josh."

"Wal, b'gosh, I think I'll go in for it. I have been thinkin' it over for some time, an' I guess I can do it. What would you try first?"

"Oh, try 'The Gladiator.' You have seen John McCullough play it."

"Yes; an' darned if I don't think I can cum putty near up to him the first time," said he, proudly.

"Not the slightest doubt of it, only you want lots of practice first. Study the part thoroughly, and accustom yourself to the dress. By the way, I think Dunellen has got a dress for *Sparticus* that he will lend you to spout and practice in."

"Good, b'gosh! I'll go right at it," said he, with much enthusiasm.

"You want to spout to strengthen and cultivate your voice, and take all sorts of exercise to get up your muscle. Keep at it all the time—that's the only way."

"An' du you think I'll make a great tragedy actor?"

"Yes (make one sick), of course. You have got everything on your side—figure, talent, voice, everything—after a sufficient amount of practice."

That settled it with Josh. He would become a great tragedian; win the applause of multitudes; and then Angelia Vandevere would only be too proud to have him court her.

He hinted to Colonel Suckerbait about what he intended to do, and, as he wasn't of any importance so far as assisting him went, and it might keep his mind employed while he was using his capital, he rather encouraged it than otherwise, although the idea of his becoming a tragedian was ludicrous enough to make him laugh in his face, or in the face of bad business.

Dick Dingle, however, took particular pains to tell the other members of the company about it, so that they would keep up the guy, and especially enjoined Angie Vandevere to encourage him on.

But it had been Josh's idea to keep it from his charmer until such time as he might be able to astonish her all of a sudden, feeling certain that she would drop into his hands like a ripe apple whenever she saw that he was, to the extent of a great tragedian, more than what she had hitherto regarded him.

But she had no notion of being cheated out of her share of the fun, and so she said to him one day:

"Josh, why don't you study for the stage? You have a fine figure, a first-class stage appearance, good voice, and I am sure you would do well if you only took to it."

"Du you really, Angie?" he asked, grinning.

"To be sure I do. Several of the company have spoken of it," said the beautiful sister.

"Wal, maybe I will. I'd do anything under the light of heaven, if I could only make you love me, Angie," said he, calmly.

"All right. You become a prominent tragedian or something of that kind, and I'll marry you."

"I'll do it, by thunder!"

"All right, and so will I. Don't say a word, but go right to work."

"You bet I will," and thus he was fired to a higher degree than before.

And he studied and spouted and made himself a nuisance generally, rehearsing the part on the stage whenever there was no one on it, and sometimes whether there was or not, and getting whoever he could to assist him.

This was most generally Dick Dingle, and he not only put the countryman through a lively course of sprouts, but caused him to afford any amount of pleasure to the company by doing the ridiculous things he told him to do.

It happened that the leading man did not have a *Sparticus* dress with him, he being fly enough to leave at home everything that he did not need in his one part engagement, so that if failure and wreck overtook him on the road, his most valuable wardrobe would be out of the reach of rapacious landlords.

And so Josh sent back to New York and bought a complete costume, unbeknown to the colonel, and greatly to his disgust afterwards, for it cost him a large sum of money which he thought should go into the business and be swallowed up in a legitimate manner.

A boy with his first pair of trousers and boots was nothing to be compared with Sheepshank when he got his new costume. By this time he had learned the words of the part, and now Dick was to put him through the "business" paces.

They were now in Cleveland, O., where they had ventured again to play a week.

Business had been none of the best in the meantime, and once more Josh had had to shell out, in order to pay salaries, but which he was reluctant in doing, and perhaps would not have done without a big kick, had not Miss Vandevere come to the front with her wheedling ways to assist the colonel.

Nor did he give up at last without a renewal on her part of her promise to marry him just as quick as he made a hit on the stage, and a regular old-fashioned courting kiss to bind the bargain.

After this had been arranged, and Josh had been pacified by explanations which made it seem perfectly natural that the combination should not pay expenses

This rope seemed to be accidentally there, and perhaps two strong men were accidentally up in the "flies" looking down with mugs agrin, and waiting for the signal.

"Ah, this rope will do," said Dick, taking up the slack end of it. "There, I will pass it around under your arms thus, representing you as the Roman captive in his cell, waiting for the pleasure of being slain to make a Roman holiday. There you are, supposed to be in irons. You pace up and down your lonely cell, and finally commence that big speech that always brings down the house, but softly, you know."

"All right," and Josh folded his arms and began to stride back and forth, probably as much like McCullough as he possibly could.

"But how came you on the front scene, anyhow, I'd like to know?"

"I was rehussin'—"

"Oh, thunder! Would you tumble if a whole house fell on you? Don't you see that the boys are making a fool of you? Git off the stage! The idea of you playing *Sparticus*! Git!"

"Well, I—"

"Git!"

By this time the rope had been slackened aloft and removed from under the victim's arms, after which it was pulled up, and Josh got off the stage.

It was lucky the curtain went down as it did, for those who were to go on for the first scene were so



"What! Du yu pretend tu say yu don't know me?" demanded Josh, indignantly. "Never saw you before in the whole course of my life that I know of." "Why, I'm Josh Sheepshank."

during the dull season, he once more dipped into tragedy, although it is doubtful whether Suckerbait would not have put a stop to the whole guy, had not Josh and his cash been so important in the face of business.

Dick and Miss Vandevere appeared to take great interest in him, and encouraged him in every way, seemingly, and especially was she gushing when he got into his Roman costume, looking about as much like a Roman as a nose does.

"Where are Forrest and John McCullough now? Look at those legs," said she, pointing to a pair that would have brought a house down.

"And the general proportion," added Dunellen.

"He's every inch a Roman,"

"And the boss Roman of them all," said Dick.

Now all this guying had only one effect on Josh Sheepshank. He took it all in, was flattered, but never tumbled.

On the occasion of which I speak, he was dressed as *Sparticus* and going through the part, while the audience was slowly collecting in front and the company behind the curtain.

Finally somebody suggested that he had better tone down his voice, or people in front might think something was wrong, and he seemed to have sense enough to see it as well.

"I'll tell you what you can rehearse," said Dick, who had a job put up for him. "Try the prison scene. You can do the business of being bound and all that in whispers, so that nobody will hear you in front."

"All right; come on," said he, enthusiastically, for by this time he was all wrought up, and if he could have had his way, would have substituted "The Gladiator" then and there for the main attraction.

Dick had it all understood with the stage carpenters, and a rope was let down outside of the front scene of the play, which was set for the first scene when the curtain went up.

"Splendid!" said Miss Vandevere, who was dressed for her part, and waiting for the curtain.

"Glorious!" added Dunellen.

"Positively grand!" said Miss Kutejack.

"That will bring down the house!" added Dick.

"Bully!" suggested Harry Pratt.

"Now, stop short and give us that speech," said Dick, "only not loud enough to be heard above the orchestra, you understand."

And Josh began to sling himself boldly into the paths of the scene.

The others retired to the wings so as to give him the whole stage, and he went in.

But while doing so those men up in the flies pulled on the rope, and the next instant the curtain was rung up, Suckerbait never noticing what was going on.

There was a stage picture for you! There hung Josh Sheepshank, just able to touch the stage with his toes, and with a look on his face that indicated actual hanging.

For an instant the people in front were paralyzed, but they presently broke out in the wildest yells, some believing it a part of the play, and others thinking it an accident.

But a "quick curtain" shut off the fun, and Colonel Suckerbait rushed wildly upon the victim.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHAT in thunder are you doing here?" demanded Suckerbait, seizing the trembling, gasping gladiator. "I—I—stop it!" he cried, looking up into the flies where the trouble seemed to be.

"Sheepshank, you are by odds the biggest nuisance I ever met in my life! Clear off the stage! Don't you see you have raised blazes?"

"Somebody raised it with me, I reckon," muttered Josh, trying to disentangle himself.

convulsed with laughter that they could not have spoken a word.

"I will see about this after the performance is over, and whoever is mixed up in it will get fined," said Suckerbait, savagely. "Now, then, everybody for the first scene," he added, going back to the "prompt side," where if he had been when the bell for the curtain was rung he would not have produced this particular scene—not down on the bills."

Once more the curtain went up and the play went on, although the audience could see plainly enough that there was a laugh ready to break from the performers, and so they were almost ready to join in.

Josh Sheepshank stood at one of the wings utterly crushed and broken up, while those who were not obliged to be on the scene had skipped out of sight to enjoy a relieving laugh.

Dick Dingle, the boss of it all, was the first one to show up, he having a greater command over his face than the others had.

But it nearly broke his spine trying to keep from laughing as he caught sight of the expression on Josh's mug.

"Say, Dick, hu don't that are?" he demanded.

"Well, I have just been up in the loft to blow up the stage-carpenter. But it appears that the rope had fallen down in front of the flats, and he discovered and attempted to pull it up out of sight just as the curtain went up, not knowing that anything was tied to it, and Suckerbait rang up without looking on to see if the stage was clear," said Dick, soberly.

"Gol darn my sister's cat's hind leg!" said he, shaking his clenched fist. "It does seem as if Old Nick war arter me all the time."

"Well, it was only an accident all around."

"But these gol-darned accidents happen altogether too often to suit me, b'gosh."

"And yet there's nobody to blame but the colonel

for ringing up without first being sure that the stage was clear."

"But did you hear the way he torked to me, Dick?" he asked, sorrowfully.

"Oh, don't mind him."

"But he said I war a consarned nuisance, an' couldn't play 'The Gladiator' fer shucks."

"Hush!" said Dick, placing his finger alongside of his nose. "Jealousy."

"What?"

"He fancies he can play that character himself, and he is jealous of you. See?"

"Oh, that's it, hey? Wal, I'll just show him whether I can play it or not," growled Josh, and as

an' he rung up that gol-darned curtain just to get ther folks in front to lardin' at me."

"As likely as not."

"Oh, I'm sure on it."

"But how about that rope?" she asked.

"What about it?"

"Why, who pulled you up so that your toes only touched and you couldn't get away?"

"Oh, Dick knows all about that. Ther stage-car-penter seed the rope just as ther curtain started to go up, an' tried to pull it up outer sight, not knowin' that I were tied to it."

"Ah, I see. So it was an accident all around," said she, musingly.

public laugh, not of approval, but of derision. You allow members of the company to guy you—to get you upon the most ridiculous strings for the sole purpose of laughing at you—yet fail to see it. Now somebody has put it into your head that you can become a second Forrest, and they are all laughing at your attempts at one of his great characters, yet you do not see it. Will you ever tumble to yourself?"

"Now, looka here, colonel, I'm posted," said Josh, with a brave front.

"What about?"

"About you."

"What about me?"

"Oh, that's all right. I understand."



There was a stage picture for you! There hung Josh Sheepshank, just able to touch the stage with his toes, and with a look on his face that indicated actual hanging.

Dick had to go on the stage the next minute, he left him, and took his station at the wing.

Miss Vandevere and Miss Kutejack came up next, laughing, though, in spite of themselves.

"What a shame that was, Josh," said Angellia, placing her hand on his arm.

"Oh, it was simply an outrage," added Miss Kutejack.

"Wal, I'll get hunk with him yet," said Josh, shaking his Roman head, decisively.

"With whom?" they both asked.

"Why, with Suckerbait."

"The colonel?"

"Yes. Didn't he ring up afore, he looked down to see how the land lay?"

"Well, perhaps he was to blame for not looking to see if the stage was clear. But you shouldn't have been on the first groove. You could just as well have been back in 'three' out of the way."

"Yu see, I never thort about that. I never thort it wur time for the darned ole rag to go up, anyhow."

"Oh, I see. You had become so identified with the character you were playing that you thought of nothing else."

"That is it," added Miss Kutejack, quite as much of a gayer as Miss Vandevere was.

"Wal, but that arn't all of it."

"Hold on, that is my cue," said Angellia, making a rush for the stage.

"Well, what is it?" asked Miss Kutejack, being left alone with the indignant victim.

"Oh, I've got him down fine, b'gosh."

"How?"

"Sh! He's jealous of me," said Josh, in a stage whisper.

"Jealous?"

"Yes. He wants to play tragedy himself, an' he's mad to see me workin' up so hefty."

"I wouldn't wonder, Josh."

"Oh, I know it; Dick told me all about it, b'gosh."

"Yes, all but Suckerbait's jealousy an' ringin' up as he did."

"Oh, well, I wouldn't say anything about it. Keep right on with your practice, and you will make him sick yet. You must take no notice of professional jealousy if you wish to succeed in your endeavors. Sail right in regardless."

She was made up for an old woman at the time, or she certainly could not have kept the face she did while guying him so unmercifully, but if she hadn't, probably Josh wouldn't have tumbled.

Then Harry Pratt, Dunellen, and two or three others took him in hand and finished the guying and soaping process, so that when the curtain went down on the first act, Josh was feeling strong enough to go alone and to confront Colonel Suckerbait.

"Look here, Sheepshank, this monkey business has got to stop," said the colonel, approaching him after the curtain was down.

Josh was still standing around in his Roman toga and things, principally to show his figure and thereby make the colonel sick and green with envy.

"I have told you before to keep off the stage and not make a holy show of yourself as you have done, and now, understand, I mean it."

"Say, yu, squire, hu's runnin' this show?" Josh finally asked, looking very earnest.

"Why, I am, of course."

"Wal, it sorter strikes me that I'm weighing out ther snigar for it," replied Josh, at which there was a general exchange of winks among those who stood around.

"Bah! What are a few paltry dollars compared with talent?"

"Wal, talent will get hungry without dollars."

"But only for a time; only until its resplendency becomes known."

"Yes, but it takes dollars to make it known."

"Not always. But that is not the point. You are forever doing some foolish thing or other to earn a

"Well, upon my word, Sheepshank, I am glad if you understand one thing."

"What business had yu to ring up that 'ere curtain without seein' the stage?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I didn't suppose there were any fools around."

"I understand it. Yu're jealous."

"Jealous! Of what?" asked Suckerbait, looking at him in surprise.

"Of me, b'gosh. Yu want to play tragedy yurself—that's what's the matter."

This was too much for the colonel, and because it was so, he burst into a loud laugh that nearly choked him, while the others scattered and made as much of it as they dared to in front of their victim.

"Josh, who put that notion into your head?"

"I'll bet it was Dick Dingle, and you are just jay enough to swallow it. Now, do try to brace up and have some shape about you."

"Shape?" exclaimed Josh, who was right there on his shape.

"Yes, I want you to keep off the stage, at all events, after it is time for the curtain to go up, and you must do it. You are ruining the business by your confounded foolishness, and it must stop; don't forget it," said the indignant manager, turning away.

"Wal, it won't stop," said Josh.

"What?"

"An' if yu give me much more of yu're sass, I'll take Angle here and bust up yer show."

"Take what? Oh, go shoot yourself!" replied Suckerbait, walking away.

"That's the way to talk to him," whispered Dick.

"Oh, I arn't afraid of him. Yu'd go with me, wouldn't yu, Angle?" he asked, turning to her.

"Why, of course," said she.

"So would the whole combination, for that matter," said Harry Pratt. "Don't let him bulldoze you," he added, confidently.

"Yu bet I won't."

But just then the curtain went up on the second act, and Josh went to his dressing-room to exchange his Roman dress for a more modern one, concluding that he had had all the rehearsal and practice he wanted that night, while the company felt that they had all the laugh on hand that they could handle and do justice to their parts.

He had one of the dressing-rooms, and he sat there a long time after reaching it, thinking how badly he had been used, and how much he had to endure in order to overcome professional jealousy.

That was what it was, he thought, and never for a moment suspected that those who pretended to be

one leg add then the other, scarcely noticing that they did not remain down.

When Angie came out, dressed for the street, Josh brace right up to her, intending of course to escort her home.

But she wouldn't have it.

"Pull down your coat," said she, laughing, and while he was trying to do so, she ran out and left him in the lurch.

It took him quite a while to discover what the trouble was, but when he did he was mad. Some people are so touchy.

But he was satisfied that somebody had played a trick on him, and he went to his hotel and to his

right ahead, complete your stage business, and you can bet your final nickel that he won't open his head to you again."

"Wal, he seen I had some grit, I guess."

"Of course. He told me he didn't think you was so full of sand," said Dick.

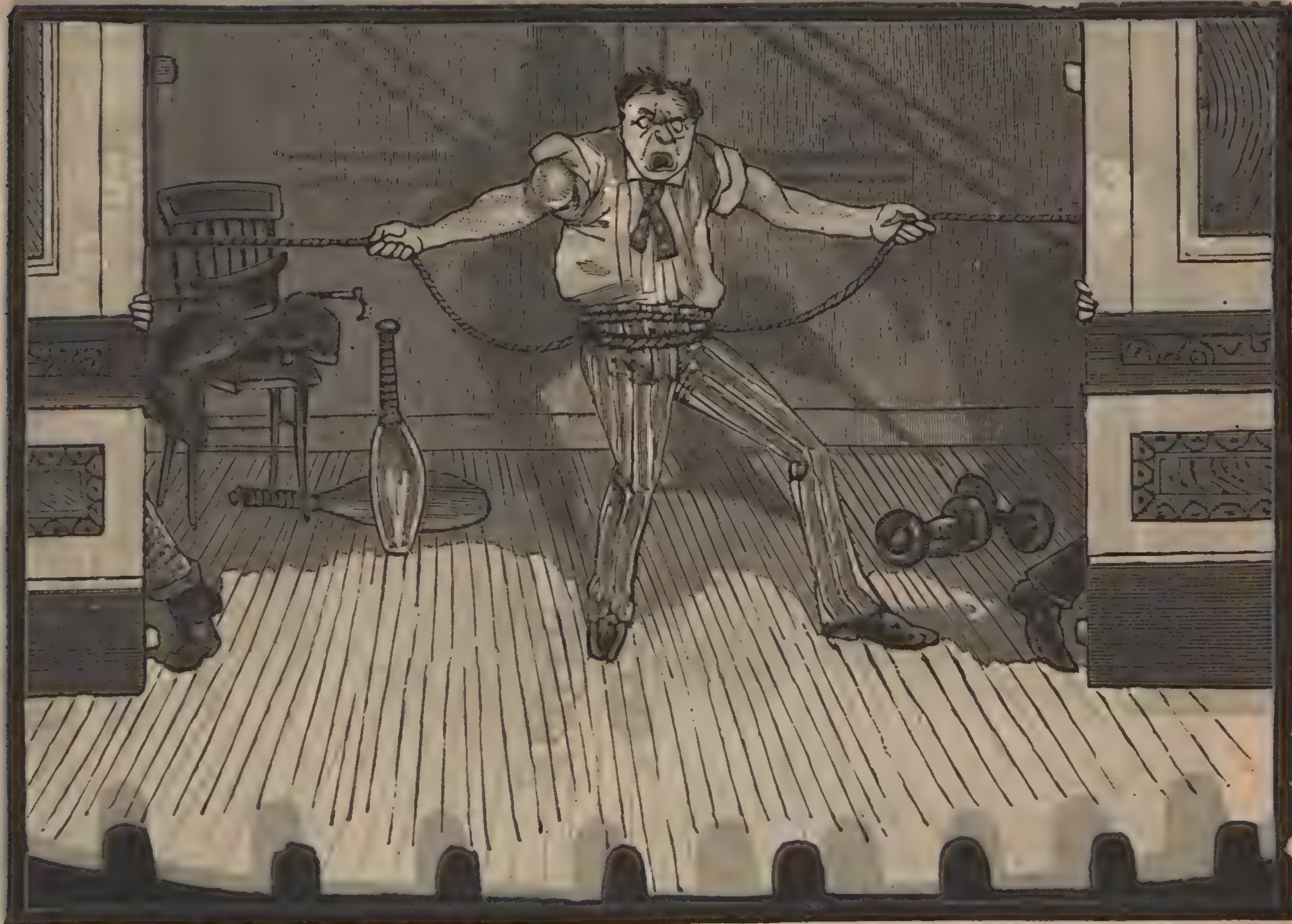
"What would yu du, Angie?"

"Why, keep right on, to be sure," said she.

"Cert. But what you want to do next, and, in fact, all the time until you get ready to make your first appearance, is to take lots of exercise to work up your muscle."

"Yes, just as McCullough does," said Angie.

"Practice with dumb-bells, horizontal bar, with



They pulled with all their might, and just then, in answer to the whistle, two scene-shifters pulled with a portion of their might, running back the flats and exposing Josh to the gaze of the astonished audience. "Stop it—stop it!" he cried, in more than a stage whisper, at the same time trying to get one way or the other out of the scrape.

his friends were guying him and urging him on for their own amusement.

Finally he began to dress himself.

Now, wasn't it strange that somebody should pin some strips of ribbon on the inside of his coat, and into the lining of each leg of his pantaloons, in such a way as to pucker them up like a piece of elastic?

But somebody did do it while he was on the stage rehearsing.

Wonder who it could have been?

But so full was his mind with what had taken place, he failed to notice it, and wishing to be at the wing when Miss Vandevere came off at the end of the piece, he dressed and went up-stairs.

The play had taken very well, and Angie came off the stage flushed with pleasurable excitement.

Naturally enough, those who did not have to dress for the afterpiece gathered around Josh, who was still looking indignant.

"Pull down your coat, Josh," said Angella; and he caught it by the skirt for that purpose.

But no sooner had he let go than it humped itself again, while his trousers' legs were half-way up to his knees for the same reason.

"Go in' home, Angie?" he asked.

"Yea, but pull down your pants," said she. "Now pull down your coat."

"Gol darn the coat! Wonder what's the matter with it?" he asked, tugging at it again.

"Oh, it's because you've got your back up," she suggested, laughing and skipping away to her dressing-room.

Then somebody else came along and suggested that Josh's coat wanted pulling down, and he again proceeded to do it while talking of something else.

Then Mr. Dunellen mentioned the fact to him that his pants wanted pulling down, and he pulled at first

room chuck full of pout. It was darned mean, and he wouldn't speak to one of the company again for a week—not even to Angie—for he felt just like punishing her with the rest, whether she knew anything about the joke or not.

They had close work to pull through a week in Cleveland, but by dint of Dick's hit in the part of *Jeremy Clip*, they managed to do so without losing money, and yet during the time Joshua Sheepshank kept well to himself, and nothing more was said about tragedy.

Indeed, he acted so offish that Suckerbait began to fear he might kick out of the traces, so he told Dick to wake him up on the subject again when they got to Columbus, their next stop.

And, of course, Dick didn't know of anything that he liked better, and, in truth, he was about the only one whom he regarded as his friend, and whom he was on speaking terms with.

But, of course, Angella had to assist Dick, which it was an easy matter for her, to do, as he had by this time got sick of pouting, and was ready to be mashed again whenever she smiled.

So she and Dick worked it, encouraging him to resume his *Sparticus* again, she reminding him of the agreement between them, which could never be kept unless he went upon the stage and made an acknowledged hit.

"Oh, I don't want to have a row with ole Suckerbait," said he, disgustedly.

"There is where you make a mistake. He has weakened dreadfully since you went for him and threatened to take me away from him," said Miss Vandevere.

"Has he, though?" Josh asked, grinning.

"Well, I should say he had," put in Dick. "Don't you see, you have him in your power? Now you go

boxing-gloves, and in all sorts of ways to develop your body, especially your legs and arms. Of course they are good now—"

"Well, I should say they were!" put in Angella.

"But he wants to make them better by big work, so that the people will howl before he says a word, Angie," said Dick, earnestly.

"Yes, you are right, Dick."

"Wal, b'gosh, I've been exercisin' myself ever since I war knee-high to a frog," said Josh, laughing.

"Yes, but that was not the right sort of exercise to develop the legs, arms, and chest. Look at those student chaps."

"All right, Dick, I'll go in for it if yu an' Angie says so," said Josh, thoughtfully.

"Of course. Don't get into the togs so often, and do it in your own room. See?"

"All right."

"But of course you can practice as much as you want in the theaters. Suckerbait won't say anything, yu her."

And so they fixed it up with him, and he went in hefty on all sorts of gymnastics.

In truth, he was as strong as a young bull, anyway, having been brought up at farm-work, but the idea of exercise ever developing for him a tragic stage-figure was absurd enough to make a wooden Indian laugh.

But in spite of all that had happened, he still believed everything that was told him, especially if it was seconded by Miss Vandevere.

At all events, he astonished members of the company by his feats of strength, and on several occasions, in a tug of war, he had outpulled five or six of them when they did their best. Indeed, in any respect they were nowhere near him.

And this, of course, made him feel very big, especial-

ly as Miss Vandevere took occasion often to compliment him, and to challenge the others to tackle him in feats of strength.

A month after his last mishap the company were at Louisville, Ky., playing to rather queer business, owing to the presence of one or two other attractions, but Miss Vandevere knew which side her bread was buttered on well enough to keep Josh on the string, and finding that she was quite as much interested in his gymnastic feats as she was in his acting, he kept right at it, ready to meet all comers.

He was at the theater one evening, and while the play was going on he was behind the wings in his shirt-sleeves, swinging his dumb-bells, climbing ropes, and doing all sorts of things to work up his calves and biceps.

Dick appeared to be championing him as usual, and one of the stage-carpenters thought he could outpull him on a rope, but he couldn't.

"B'gosh, I'll tell you what I'll do," said he, after trying all comers singly, and Dick had put him up to the trick. "I'll bet ther sody an' cigars that I'll wind this rope round my waist, you two chaps to have each end an' give me six inches slack in each hand, that both of you stage-carpenters can't pull the slack away from me so as to tighten ther rope round my body. What du you say?"

They both agreed to try it, and a long rope was turned once around his body.

This was behind a set of flats, in front of which a scene of the play was going on.

Josh planted himself in the middle of the stage, and the two stout carpenters stood inside of the wings, each with an end of the rope in his hands, while Josh grasped the center firmly.

"Are you all ready?" they asked.

"Yes, go ahead."

They pulled with all their might, and just then, in answer to the whistle, two scene-shifters pulled with a portion of their might, running back the flats and exposing Josh to the gaze of the astonished audience.

"Stop it—stop it!" he cried, in more than a stage whisper, at the same time trying to get one way or the other out of the scrape.

With the change of scene it was Dick's turn to go on, and the people soon saw there was a joke afoot.

"Whirl round and round!" said Dick, and Josh obeyed, finally reaching the cover of a wing, while the people in front laughed heartily.

Josh Sheepshank was wildly mad, and he went hunting for those stage-carpenters.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE good people of Louisville had never seen such a performance as that was, either in comedy, tragedy, farce, or circus, and although Dick Dingle went on with his part without offering any explanation, they came to the conclusion that somebody had had a practical joke played on them, and so laughed it off.

But Josh Sheepshank wanted gore.

He wanted the scalps and vital parts of those two stage-carpenters who had played the trick on him, and he went for them.

For the first few moments after escaping it did seem as though nothing short of at least one quivering human heart would satisfy him.

But it took him a minute or so to recover enough of his equanimity to get his bearings, and even while doing so he saw Suckerbait on the other side of the stage in the prompt place, shaking his fist at him in a threatening manner.

And while this was taking place, those wags of stage-carpenters had time to so change their dresses and general appearance that Josh, to save his life, could not recognize them. Indeed, he had not taken very particular notice of them at all.

But gore he must have, and so he rushed off in the direction they would naturally be in, with clenched fists and fire in his eyes.

One of them had skipped around and taken the place of one of the scene-shifters on the other side, and the other one was busy with a tape-line, as though he had something important on hand.

"Say, where's that 'durned cuss'?" Josh demanded, approaching him.

"Sixteen feet three inches by forty feet-nine," muttered the man, marking something on a paper, and then looking up at Josh, he asked: "What's that?"

"Where's them tu 'durned cusses'?"

"Well, sir, I haven't the slightest idea who you mean. What's the matter?"

"Gol darn my old aunt's cat. Show me them 'darned cusses' that got me into that scrape, an' I'll show you what's ther matter!" cried Josh, shaking his fist at him.

"Get out, you mugwump! Don't push your tater-grabbers in my face," said the carpenter. "What in thunder is the matter with you, anyway?"

"I want to find them 'durned cusses'."

"Well, why the blazes don't you go and find 'em then? What are you musing around here for?"

"Where be they?"

"How the deuce do I know? Go die!"

"I won't die till I kill them cusses, 'durned if I du," he growled, and believing that he had not got the right party, he turned away.

Near the first entrance he met Miss Vandevere. She had been laughing immoderately, but had by this time got her handsome face smoothed out so that it looked both sober and sympathetic.

"What a shame that was, Josh," said she.

"Shame! Where be they?" he demanded, wildly.

"Who?"

"Why, them 'durned cusses' as held me with that rope right afore the people."

"I think I saw them go out of the stage entrance."

"Where?"

"Oh, they have most likely run away before this, knowing what was good for them."

"Angie, it's lucky for their gol-darned pelts that they did git out, for I'm feelin' bad now."

"Feeling bad?"

"Yes, you bet."

"Did they hurt you, Josh?" she asked, catching him by the arm, and looking up into his face with anxious inquiry, exceedingly dramatic.

"Hurt me? Gol darn 'em! they made a blamed fule of me, an' I want to lay hands on 'em, that's what!" said he.

"But they have died."

"An' it's gol-darned lucky for 'em that they have! But I'll get 'em yet."

"And it will serve them right if you do—that is, if they did it on purpose," said she. "But didn't you know that the scene was to be drawn off just then?"

"No, but they orter."

Just then Dick Dingle came off the stage where they were, followed by loud applause.

"Ah, old man, didn't I get you out of that snap all right?" he asked of Josh.

"Wal, but who got me into it?"

"Why, it was a mistake, that's all. The fact is, if you had been one groove further up, it would have been all right. But nobody appears to have thought of it."

"But why didn't they let go when they seen the predicament I was in?"

"Well, probably they were confused, and didn't know what to do for a moment. But it's all right, Josh," he added, patting his back.

"All right! How, b'gosh?"

"Why, it made a laugh, and that's what we are all working for—eh, Angie?"

"Of course it is, Dick, and as things happen, I think that Mr. Sheepshank gets bigger ones than any of us," said she.

"That is certainly so."

"But I'm all the time being made a darned fule of," he protested, indignantly.

"Well, it makes a laugh," said Miss Vandevere.

"Larf! but that arn't my racket. I war out out for tragedy, an' I don't want to make people larf. I want to make 'em cry."

"Well, you probably will when you get to playing tragedy," said Dick, while he and Miss Vandevere exchanged smiles.

"But it's all-fired lucky that them cusses got out of the way just as they did," and just then the curtain went down at the end of the act, and Colonel Suckerbait approached him.

"Well, I see you managed to make an ass of yourself again," was his first salutation.

"It wan't my fault," growled Josh.

"Oh, no! It wasn't your fault when you got strung up before the audience as the gladiator. It is never your fault, but you somehow manage to make a mule of yourself all the time. How many more times have I got to tell you to keep off the stage with your rotten nonsense? Can't you see that everybody, even to the stage-carpenters, are continually geying you? Oh, you make me tired!" he added, turning away.

Josh didn't appear to have anything to say.

The other members of the company had laughed their fill, and several of them now gathered around Josh, seemingly in sympathy with him.

"Don't mind what that old duffer says about rotten nonsense," said Dick. "You know where the shoe pinches with him. He thinks he is a tragedian, and don't want to see you developing into one."

"That's so," said Harry Pratt.

"More than likely," the others suggested.

"Wal, maybe 'tis, but I don't want no more monkey business with me, an' I won't have it neither. So now, b'gosh, fun's fun, but things has been goin' a little tu funny for me lately, b'gosh, an' I won't stand it," said Josh, energetically.

"Nobody blames you, Josh, only I wouldn't take any notice of old Suckerbait. Let him kick and growl. You go right on, for if I am capable of judging, you are destined to make a big hit in tragedy yet," said Dunellen.

At this they all nodded in unison, and Josh felt himself grow six inches in an instant, and was all right again once more.

But his frequent mishaps annoyed Colonel Suckerbait very much, and he couldn't get it out of his head that Dick Dingle was at the bottom of more than half the mischief.

And so, at the close of the performance that night, having something to say to Dick about business, he told him to come to his room at the hotel.

Dick was always expecting a blowing up from the old man, and made it a point to be ready to assert and show his innocence. But on this occasion the colonel had something else on his mind, and felt but little like chiding anything save fortune.

And yet it would not be him if he did not put in more or less of a growl if there was a possible chance, and so he went for Dick as usual.

"For Heaven's sake, Dick, things look blue and squally enough at best, so let the fool alone, or at least don't show him off before the public. I don't hardly blame you, for he is such a confounded jay, but you hadn't ought to carry it to such a ridiculous degree as to make him believe that he can play tragedy."

"Oh, he got that himself from seeing John McCullough there in New York, and somebody has told him that he has a figure and presence like Edwin Booth, and that is what's doing the business," said Dick, honestly.

"Somebody! Who was that somebody?"

"Give it up, colonel."

"Well, maybe you do; but I'll bet you were that very one. Now, as I said before, I don't blame you

for having fun with him, but work it in some other way. He is necessary to us, as you know, as long as his money lasts; but, for goodness' sake, keep him back."

"All right, so far as I am concerned," replied Dick, soberly.

"Well, I'll risk it if you will only keep your hands off. But what I wish to talk with you about is this: Business is bad, and, in order to make out a paying week here, we have got to resort to some funny business."

"All right. Going to rob Miss Vandevere again?" asked Dick, laughing.

"No, it won't do to play so good a thing as that too often. No; you and I will work a snap. It's simple. You can make up as Edwin Booth?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I'll have a little squib put in the *Journal*, stating that Edwin Booth is in the city, and will probably be at the Opera House this evening, as Miss Vandevere is a pupil and favorite of his. You can make up and occupy one of the boxes, so that people can get a sight of the great tragedian. Follow me?"

"Every time, colonel."

"All right. Do it well."

"As usual?"

"Yes; for that will be good enough."

That was all Dick Dingle wanted. The remainder would work itself out, and, as he thought, with some fun in it.

His "make up" for Edwin Booth was so good that it would have deceived his most intimate friends, and he felt confidence in it, for in all the characters he studied and worked off in his part, whenever the whim seized him, there was more fine artistic ability displayed than is generally seen in things of this kind. He studied the characters so close, and made up so close, that they would not only bear the inspection usually given to them before the foot-lights, but a very much closer inspection as well, while the imitation of voice and gesture was quite as perfect.

About the first thing he did was to confer with Angelia Vandevere, who was ever ready to second any of his fun, and together they had a good understanding regarding the snap.

Colonel Suckerbait attended to his part of the arrangement, and the next day, among the items of general interest in the *Louisville Journal*, was one announcing that the distinguished tragedian, Edwin Booth, was in the city for a day or two, and that he would most likely attend the Opera House that evening, as it was well known in the profession that one of the lady members of the company was a protegee of his.

This, of course, did not create a sensation, except with the members of the aforesaid company; but it was noticed by theater-going people, and was commented upon freely.

It had been some time since the great tragedian had played at Louisville, and many asked the object of his visit, and before night it was even whispered around that he had come there for the purpose of building a theater that should bear his own name.

At all events, this item of news was sufficient to pack the house, which greatly astonished those who were not in the racket.

Josh Sheepshank got hold of it and rushed wildly to Suckerbait with the news.

"That's bully for us, Josh. See what a house!" replied the colonel, pointing to the peep-hole in the proscenium.

"But where's Mr. Booth?" asked Josh.

"Oh, he'll be along later on."

"Wal, b'gosh, I want to see him. I hearn say he war just old Jehosaphat in *Hamlet*, *Jago*, an' *Richard*, with ther corn on his back."

"Yes, he is a very great actor," said the colonel, turning away, while Josh scattered what he supposed was news.

Indeed, they all pretended to believe that it was news, and that they had never dreamed of such a thing until he told them.

Then Miss Vandevere had to be told, of course.

"Yes, I've heard about it, Josh, and it will be a very distinguished honor if he visits our entertainment. Have you ever seen him?" she asked.

"No; but I've seen his pictures, an' I should know him fast-rate," replied he.

"Well, you must do the proper caper, Josh."

"What's ther proper caper?"

"Wait around the front entrance, and when he comes, escort him to a private box. See?"

"Why, in course I du. Guess thar arn't anything in ther house tu good for him."

"Certainly not. And it wouldn't be a bad scheme to place a nice bouquet in his box. That will call attention to the fact that he is expected, and, as he is a great favorite here in Louisville, the caper will be appreciated."

"Angie, I'll du it, b'gosh! I'll show him in with my Sunday peritiness," said he, rushing away delightedly.

He procured a very handsome bouquet, and had it placed in a vase on the right-hand private box, and when Colonel Suckerbait and the others saw it, they laughed so they could scarcely play their parts.

But the audience took it all as genuine, and the beautiful vase of flowers attracted more eyes than the performers did, for the whisper went from mouth to ear all through the audience that it had been placed there for Edwin Booth, who would probably occupy the box before the performance was over.

Joshua Sheepshank was all elation, for the thought that he was to receive Edwin Booth and escort him to the box was glory enough for a young man who was ambitious of being a tragedian; and he had it all arranged with the ushers that all the honor was to fall on him. No ordinary swallow-tailed usher was to escort

that distinguished man, who had honored them with his presence.

Well, the play went on until Dick Dingle had got through with his part. A cab was in waiting at the stage entrance for him, and in a few minutes he was made up magnificently as Edwin Booth, ready for a start.

There was no time to be lost, for it was even then getting late, and the people in front were becoming slightly impatient. So he bounded into the cab, and ordered the driver to take him around the block, and to the front of the theater.

Even the driver himself believed that he had the distinguished tragedian for a fare, and he was exceedingly polite, being ordered to remain there a short time and be ready to take him back to the stage entrance.

Josh was on hand full of bows and all sorts of crude

Juliet," and there was not the slightest question but that the gag was a perfect success.

Dick not only looked the character, but acted it to perfection, and Josh, in the auditorium, was loud in talking with anybody who wished to know anything about the celebrated actor.

The curtain soon after went up on the last act of "The Bride," and Miss Vandevere had the best scenes in her part to do.

The supposed Edwin Booth was all attention, and in two or three good points applauded her; the act of which was, of course, repeated earnestly. It was a big success, and growing all the time.

Josh was full of it. He rushed around to see Colonel Suckerbait, and ask him what he thought of giving Mr. Booth a supper after the show, and the colonel got right into it with enthusiasm, for the snap had drawn big money, and they could afford to

ticular pains to imitate was the 'self-same' Edwin Booth, as *Richelieu*, which he did to perfection, and the applause he received was tremendous.

But how few of those who applauded him (if, indeed, there was a solitary one) suspected that the gifted young actor and personator was the same one whom they had so recently been cheering as the Simon pure and original!

On this account, perhaps, the farce proved even more successful than ever, and it looked as though at least another full week might have been profitably put in on the strength of that farce and the artistic imitator. Indeed, Dick Dingle was even now the leading attraction, and the notices he got in the papers would have turned a head less evenly balanced than his was.

But when the show was over the grand rush was for the hotel where the supper to Edwin Booth was in



"Get out, you mugwump! Don't push your later-grabbers in my face," said the carpenter. "What in thunder is the matter with you, anyway?"

politeness, and the moment the distinguished visitor stepped from the cab he was at his side.

"Right this way, Mr. Booth," said he, loud enough to be heard by those standing near, and then there was a rush to get a look at him. "Stand back, you god-darned greenies! Ain't ya got any puritaneas 'bout you?" he added, and taking the great tragedian by the arm, he escorted him into the theater and to the private box.

A rush near the entrance attracted the attention of the audience, and in an instant they were all on their feet, craning their necks to get a look at the man so distinguished.

It was just before the curtain went up on the last act of the play, and Suckerbait and those who got an idea of how the thing was working were loud in their praises of Dick Dingle's acting and make-up.

"There, Mr. Booth, I hope you'll like the play an' the posies I have bought you," said Josh, pointing him to a front seat in the box.

"Sir, you are very kind," said Dick, bowing with stage politeness and imitating the tragic vein of Edwin Booth to perfection.

"Make yureself at home, Mr. Booth, for it won't cost you a cent," added Josh.

"So kind—so kind!" and the tragedian seated himself stably and faced the opera-glasses and the eyes of everybody in the house.

He glanced at the flowers and smelled them, while Josh, seeing he was not asked to take a seat with him, retired, to share his honors by being looked at for having escorted so great a man.

The orchestra played a march from "Romeo and

spend some of it, while still carrying out the fun.

So Josh got some young fellows to propose three cheers for Edwin Booth as he escorted him from the theater, and they didn't want anything better. The cheers were given with a will, the audience rising as they cheered and waving their handkerchiefs, to which Dick bowed with dignified politeness, and finally passed out of the vestibule, leaning on Josh's honored arm, followed by a large concourse of people.

"We'd like to give ya a little feed to night, Mr. Booth," said Josh, assisting him into the cab.

"I shall feel honored, kind sir, in accepting your proffered hospitality. I will be at your hotel," replied Dick, with such a close imitation of Booth's peculiar intonation that several who stood around the cab and overheard it did not doubt for one moment, knowing him well, that it was Edwin Booth, the great tragedian.

He drove away, followed by three more cheers, and in two minutes was behind the scenes again, receiving the hearty congratulations of his fellow-artists and his delighted manager. But he had scarcely time to get off his make-up before Josh got around and proceeded to paralyze the company by his consequence, and telling about the coming supper, which he set off at once to the hotel to order.

Indeed, there was quite as much interest and fun behind the scenes as there was in front. True, a great many had gone out after "Mr. Booth" did, but as the farce—with Dick Dingle in his great part of *Jeremy Clip*—was really the chief attraction, there remained behind a goodly crowd, who welcomed him with enthusiastic plaudits.

And among the renowned actors that he took par-

progress, under the management of Joshua Sheepshank, who remembered every word the great tragedian had said, and was all the while imitating his voice and gesture.

And a large number of citizens, hearing that there was to be a complimentary feed, hung around the hotel to get an idea of it, if not a piece of it.

Josh had gone in heavy on his order, and when the company arrived at the hotel—Dick having preceded them in his make-up of Booth—they found that something more than the ordinary was on the carpet.

"Take a lesson from him, Josh," suggested Miss Vandevere.

"You bet I will, Angie," he replied.

CHAPTER XV.

WELL, that after-performance supper to "Edwin Booth" was a great racket, and every member of the great Suckerbait Combination was on hand, you bet, to get a piece of it, each one of them having enjoyed the successful gag on the public, and also believing that Dick Dingle would outdo himself in this part of the racket.

Josh Sheepshank was all business and full of excitement, which Colonel Suckerbait did not attempt to check in the least. It wasn't every day that so distinguished a member of their profession condescended to partake of the hospitality of a traveling show, and he was bound to make it memorable.

At twelve o'clock the head-waiter at the hotel informed Josh that everything was ready, and that he could trot in his guests as soon as he wanted to.

Dick was watching everything, and was not hard to find when the feed was ready. Josh offered him his arm and escorted him into the private supper-room, followed by the other members of the company.

But instead of taking the head of the table himself, or offering it to Colonel Suckerbait, Josh plumped the guest of the evening into it, and took a seat on his right.

The colonel would have undoubtedly taken either the head or the right, had he not been afraid to trust himself, so he sat lower down, and the others got seated as best they could.

"Now deal out yu're fodder," said Josh, turning to the head-waiter, while Dick Dingle winked to his friends and fellows.

The waiters began to fly around, and soon the music—the rat-a-plan—of knives, forks and spoons was a-going right merrily, and the champagne was not absent.

Josh was the observed of all observers, although thinking, of course, that Mr. Booth occupied that position.

But he chinned the "great tragedian" most unmercifully, asking him all sorts of questions, some of which were of such a delicate nature that it made it fortunate for Josh that the person he supposed was talking to was not there. It afforded much pleasure, however, as it was.

"Now, say, Mr. But, which du yu consider your gol-darnedest bang-up character?" he asked.

"Well, sir, were I going to speak in my own behalf, I should say *Iago*," replied Dick, again imitating Booth so well that the company applauded him, although Josh didn't see the point.

The supper was nearly through with by this time, and the company was nibbling at the nuts and raisins, and ready for all the fun that came up.

"B'gosh, I'd like to see yu play it. Du yu know, Mr. But, I'm goin' to play tragedy one of these days," he added, proudly.

"Indeed! The classic?"

"Wal, no, I'm goin' to play Shakespeare mostly."

"Oh, yu are, eh? Well, I dare say yu will succeed even as well as I have."

"I'm a highster, I am."

"Yu seem to have everything on yu'r side, my dear sir, which is more than many actors have. Would yu object to giving us a little recital? I have no doubt but that the members of yu'r fine company know how well yu can do, but I would crave yu'r indulgence on mine own account."

"What a great actor that Dick Dingle is," whispered Suckerbait to his leading man and lady, to which they could not gainsay.

"What shall I spout?" asked Josh.

"Oh, whatever yu please, or, if yu would have me suggest, I would say *Claude Melnot's* fine description of his home by the Lake of Como."

"Oh, I'm a ring-tailed snorter at that," and, with cheek enough for anything, he got up and commenced to repeat the speech.

Yes, he was right about being a ring-tailed snorter at that beautiful poem; and had he not been among those who knew him, they would have pelted him with dishes.

And had he really been *Claude Melnot*, and talked that way to a *Pauline* who was ever so badly "gone," and was just crazy to get married, she would have forgotten her pride and kicked him out.

But "Mr. Booth" and the others were highly delighted, and applauded him wildly.

"Great! very great! Ladies and gentlemen, I think I have the pleasure of heralding a new tragedian to the world," said Dick. "But will yu let me hear *Hamlet's* soliloquy?" he added, to Josh.

"What's that?"

"Why, that beautiful extract, beginning:

"To be, or not to be—that's the question, Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The stings and arrows of outrageous fortune," etc."

said Dick, imitating the very voice, look and gesture of Booth in that celebrated passage. It was all they could do to keep from applauding the effort; but that did not abash Josh in the least, and so he began to render it.

It was terrible. Those who have heard country school-boys "speak a piece," can get a partial idea of what it was like.

But they applauded it all the same, and Josh was up so high that it was hard work to choke him off. He would give the dagger scene from "*Macbeth*," but while skipping around after that imaginary razor that was flying through the air, he tripped against the leg of a chair, or some other impediment, and tumbled upon the table.

Then all hands applauded some more, and the waiters picked up and counted the broken dishes.

"I am very much obliged to yu, Mr. Sheepshank, and am proud to know yu. I even now welcome yu as a great brother actor. But I will not trouble yu any more to-night," said Dick.

"Lemme try *Maro Antony's* oration over the dead body of *Caesar*," he suggested.

"No, no, thanks. It is getting late. But if yu will come to my room to-morrow, I will gladly hear yu recite."

"All right. Maybe I wur brought up on a farm, but I've got some stuff in me."

"Most potent, grave, and reverend seigneur, yu are dead right. Yu have."

"Now, afore we break up, I'll introduce yu to my company," said he, entirely ignoring the colonel, and so he proceeded to introduce him as he walked down the line of the table, and they all carried out their parts splendidly.

"Wal, say, where's Dick Dingle?" Josh suddenly asked, not seeing him present.

"Just gone out," said Harry Pratt.

"I'm sorry for that, Mr. But, for he's quite a promising young actor. But I will introduce yu to him to-morrow."

"Very well; I shall be pleased to meet him. His name is—"

"Dick Dingle," said several.

"Ah, shall feel honored. But now I must retire. Thanking yu for yu'r princely entertainment, ladies and gentlemen, I hope to meet yu often hereafter, and most likely when yu are supporting Mr. Sheepshank in some of the characters I have tried to make famous. Ladies and gentlemen all, a kind good-night," and with a wonderfully effective bow he turned and walked from the room.

Josh at once attempted to imitate that effective, but came about as near to doing it as he had to approaching Booth in his recitations.

But the curb was off by this time, and each member of the company felt at liberty to let themselves out a reef or two.

"They laughed and shook each other by the hand, and said it was the best entertainment they had ever taken part in."

But Josh was too puffed up with egotism and self-consequence to understand what they meant by it, or why they laughed so heartily while talking of a complimentary affair, yet, putting it all together, it could mean but the one thing, and that all in his favor.

"Now, maybe yu think I'm a slouch," said he, triumphantly. "Now, maybe yu think I'm a gol-darned fule. Now, maybe yu think I can't spout an' act?"

"Show me the man that dares to think so," said Harry Pratt in a dramatic way.

"Wal, I should say not! If Mr. But don't know what's what, guess none of yu du," and he strode up and down the room.

At that moment Dick Dingle returned to the room in his proper person, and his followers gave him a round of applause that Josh, in his abstraction, thought intended for him.

"I say, Dick, did yu hear what Edwin But said about me?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, I heard him say that yu had the making of a great actor in yu," replied Dick.

"An' yu bet he knows what he is torkin' about all ther time."

"Well, I should murmur."

"I know'd all ther time that all I wanted was a chance," frowning at Colonel Suckerbait.

"Well, how much has this feed cost us?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, never mind 'bout that!" said he, waving his hand loftily. "An' say, Dick, I'm goin' to his room to-morrow to spout some more," he added.

"So? What room does he occupy?"

"I d'know, but the clerk 'll tell me. Never thort to ask him. Wal, Angie, what du yu think about it?" he asked, turning to his adored one.

"I think it splendid, and must congratulate yu on yu'r wonderful success. I knew yu had made a hit when I saw yu escort him to the box."

"Oh, he know'd me right off, I guess."

"No doubt of it. But it is getting late, and I must retire," she added, starting for the door.

"Wal, b'gosh, I don't feel as though I'd want to go to bed for a week," said Josh, as the party crowded out of the private dining-room, laughing and scattering to their respective rooms.

Josh tried to button-hole several of them, but they all pretended to be sleepy, and so got away, leaving him finally alone.

"The darned fules are all jealous of me because Edwin But made up to me," he muttered. "But it's all right; I ken afford it if they ken," he added, and then, seeing nobody to chin on the subject, he reluctantly started for his room.

But if he could have overheard the laughing there was in the other rooms occupied by the members of the combination, he might have thought they were not quite so jealous after all.

It was a great triumph for Josh, however, and once in his room, he couldn't resist the temptation of indulging in a little more Shakespeare, and so began to spout the "air-drawn dagger" scene again, without the slightest regard to the feelings or slumbers of those on either side of him.

This had not continued long before several electric bells were rung, and three or four people, who had been awakened from their slumbers, began to yell:

"Put him out!" "Shut up!" "Fire him out of the window!" etc., etc.

Three or four porters rushed up to answer the bells, not knowing but the hotel was on fire, or a murder had been committed, that had caused the sudden agitation of so many bells all at once.

"What sort of a hotel do yu call this?" asked one of the night-gowned guests, opening the door.

"There's a man in that room got the jim-jams, I guess, for he sees snakes and daggers," said another.

"Send for the police!"

"Throw him out of the window!"

"Pull a rubber boot over his head!" and various other suggestions were made, while Josh kept right on, oblivious to everything.

One of the porters pounded on his door and opened it at the same time.

There was Josh, trying to catch up with that bloody air-drawn dagger, while the other porters and guests gazed upon him.

"Say—hello! What's the matter?" asked the porter.

"Come, let me clutch thee!" continued Josh, spouting the text and never heeding them.

"No, I'll be hanged if I do!" said the porter, starting back in alarm.

"I have thee not, and yet I see thee still!"

"Well, yu'll see a police-officer if yu don't stop this infernal racket," said the man.

"Run him out!"

"Yes, he's crazy!"

"And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"This nonsense must stop, sir!" said the porter, seizing him.

"Hello! What in thunder's the matter with yu?" he asked, looking around, and for the first time forgetting his tragic attitude.

"Yu are disturbing people in the hotel."

"Yu don't say so?"

"Yes, and it must stop."

"Wal, they must be gol-darned particular when they let Shakespeare disturb 'em."

"Oh, Shakespeare won't disturb us if yu will only let him alone," said one of the indignant guests, turning away.

"Yes, give Shakespeare a rest, and let us sleep," added another one, laughing, for he saw it was not delirium tremens, but only the next thing to it—a bad case of stage-struck.

"All right," replied Josh, sullenly, and in a few moments all was quiet again.

But it did seem to him that some people had no poetry in their souls, when they would let such a recitation as that disturb them. Edwin Booth would never have been disturbed by it.

However, he finally got to sleep, and peace reigned again all over the hotel. The big laugh of the evening had died away on faces that still smiled in their sleep, and Josh finally got lost in the land of dreams, without having discovered the trick that had been played upon him.

The next morning he was astir bright and early, chuck full of the new life that had been crammed into him the night before, and bound still further to astonish the great tragedian on whom he had made such an impression the night before.

It was a singular coincidence, but by an early train that morning Edwin Booth really did arrive in Louisville, intending to stop over for the day, although he did not go to the same hotel with the Great New York Combination.

This fact was discovered by Africanus Muff, the chief bill distributor and general utility colored man of the afore and oft-mentioned combination, he having been at the depot on his arrival.

Josh was the only one around when Muff came to the hotel afterwards, and as the same Edwin Booth was supposed to have been at the theater the night before, and at the same time as he also appeared to be just arriving in town at an early hour, the oddness of the thing struck the darkey, and so he asked Josh about it, all in good faith, for he had not been let into the snap at all.

"Oh, I s'pose he'd been out for an early ride," suggested Josh, after Muff had told him. "Them big tragedy fellers allus want fresh early air. I feel some that way myself, b'gosh," he added, puffing out his lungs and pounding them with his big clenched fists.

"Just so, boss; I often feels dat way myself, specially when I has to sleep on de park," he added, to himself. "But what he takes his bags an' bundles an' his servant 'long wid him for?"

"Oh, I d'know. Tragedy fellers are allus queer. Has he come to the hotel?"

"No, he gwize up to de Grand."

"Oh, there's where he is stoppin', hey? I thort he wur hangin' out here," mused Josh, and at the same time he made a note of it, resolved on calling upon him during the day.

Later on Muff met Colonel Suckerbait, and also mentioned to him about seeing Mr. Booth on his arrival.

"What is that yu say?" asked Suckerbait, in quick astonishment.

Muff retold his incidental experience.

"Thunder and blazes!" he exclaimed, and a cloud of perplexity gathered on his brow.

He knew by the announcements that Booth was not going to play in Louisville right away, and understood that he was most likely stopping over for a day's rest. But what if he should find out about the cheat that had been practiced on the public at his expense? What would be the consequences? Would there be a kick and an exposure, or would he simply take no notice of it?

They had two nights yet to play in Louisville, and if it should become known that Edwin Booth had not been in town, and had not been at the theater the night before, the reaction would knock his expected business higher than a burnt boot.

The morning papers had an account of the affair, and one of them mentioned the fact of the complimentary feed that had been given him, and as he would naturally look at the morning papers, what conclusion would he be likely to arrive at regarding himself—that he was in his senses or out of them? Would it suggest itself to him that he was some hundreds of miles away at the time he was reported to have been receiving the honors of the people of Louisville, or would it pass for a dream into which he would become so much mixed that he would either get lost and not try to untangle, or would he send for a doctor in order to find out what the matter was with him?

A full train and two baggage cars of such thoughts as these swam through the brain of the colonel, and what to do he did not know, beyond keeping perfectly quiet and watching matters; and if the indignant tragedian should demand of him personally an explanation, he would simply fall back on the fact of his being imposed upon himself by a man bearing a remarkably strong resemblance, assisted by a notice in one of the papers.

But while all this was going on, and he and Dick Dingle were deploring the situation, Joshua Sheepshank was laying for Edwin Booth, and at the same time they were wondering where he was, and if he had yet tumbled.

Oh, no, he hadn't tumbled yet, for the simple reason that no house had fallen on him.

But about noon he requested one of the hall-boys to show him up to Mr. Booth's room, assuring him that he was one of that gentleman's most particular friends, and was shown up with considerable attention.

Mr. Booth had just finished breakfast, and was reading the morning papers, not calculating on seeing anybody during his stay, and almost the first local item that his eye rested on was the one regarding his reception at the Opera House, followed by the supper afterwards.

And it was while puzzling over the possibility of being in two places at the same time that Josh checked his way into his sitting-room.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Booth," said he, cheerily; "yu're lookin' fust-chop this mornin'."

The haughty and dignified tragedian looked up at the intruder out of the bewilderment of the item he

ason you will have the kindness to leave my presence, sir!" he thundered.

"But, b'gosh, I—"

"Michael!" called the tragedian to his valet.

Now, Michael knew his business. He had probably relieved his master of five hundred cranks and bores of various kinds, and without waiting for an introduction or further instructions, he snatched Josh by the collar.

"But, I say, Mr. Booth—" he began to protest.

"Git!" said Michael, running him towards the door.

"Got darn yure picter, I—"

But before he had time to fairly express himself, he was going down-stairs on all-fours at double-quick, making a great racket, which finally resulted in the cry of "Hotel thief!" and the detective of the Grand collared and rushed the unfortunate victim off to the

ed an overwhelming laugh when they learned that Josh, not contented with being the witness in the first farce, had actually followed his usual luck to the extent of originating another farce and becoming the victim of that as well.

The officer of the hotel, when he went back to the station house to secure Josh's liberation, took a quiet look at him.

"Say, young fellow, what is the matter with you?" he asked.

"Matter! I'm mad, b'gosh," replied Josh.

"Well, I should say so."

"An' who wouldn't be tu be served the way I have? Look at my clothes—all bust, and covered with dirt," said he, looking at himself.

"Yes; but what did you want to get into such a scrape for?"



"Say!—hello! What's the matter?" asked the porter. "Come, let me clutch thee!" continued Josh, spouting the text and never heeding them. "No, I'll be hanged if I do!" said the porter, starting back in alarm. "I have thee not, and yet I see thee still!"

had been reading about himself and nodded inquiringly, but without recognizing him, of course.

"Didn't know yu wur stoppin' here. Thort yu wur at our hotel," said he, familiarly, and at the same time helping himself to a chair. "But seeln' as how yu asked me, I thort I'd call round an' give yu some more of my tragedy," he added.

Edwin Booth was slightly taken aback. He had encountered nearly every style of crank to be met with in the world, and understood how to deal with them; but this one, coming right on top of this mysterious news item, puzzled him for the moment.

"Well, sir, who and what are you?" he finally demanded, turning upon him.

"Why, don't you remember me last night?"

"No, sir, I don't remember to have ever seen you before. What do you wish with me?"

"Why, last night, at the Opera House, an' up tu the hotel where we gin yu a supper, an' I spouted!"

"Sir, this is either a piece of this imposture printed in the morning *Journal* here, or you or I am crazy. I was not at the Opera House last night, as the paper states. I was not at any supper last night at the hotel, for the very good reason that I was some hundreds of miles away. Now, sir, explain!" he cried, rising in the majesty of tragedy and approaching Josh.

"Whv, I—but yu—don't yu—" asked Josh, getting somewhat uneasy.

"No, sir," roared Booth. "I do not. You are evidently one of two or three things—either a fool, a knave, or a dupe—neither of which I have any wish to communicate with, for which good and sufficient

station-house, in spite of his protests and indignation

CHAPTER XVI.

No further notice was taken of the matter by Mr. Booth, for he concluded, after making some inquiries, that some cheap fraud had been practicing an imposition of some grade or other for the sake of drawing a house to a doubtful show, and that to go further than simply have his agent deny it in the papers might subject him to ridicule and give the impostors more advertising than they had already got.

But how was it with poor Josh Sheepshanks, who had been dragged off to the lock-up by the officer of the hotel mistaking him for a hotel thief who had been caught in the act and kicked down stairs?

He was locked up, in spite of his protests, while the officer went back to hunt up evidence on which to base a charge, but which, of course, could not be obtained, as the simple truth was told, on the strength of which he was discharged; but not until something of the truth had leaked out; not until it was pretty well known by the police of Louisville and several outsiders that a big fraud had in some way or other been practiced in regard to Edwin Booth's visit to the Opera House the night before.

The story of it reached the hotel where the combination was stopping before Josh got back there, but of course Snickerbait and the other interested ones poo-pooed in such a way as to leave the truth of the matter still in doubt, although of course they enjoy-

"What scrape—getting kicked down stairs and getting locked up for it?"

"Well, that's one end of it. But what did you go to Edwin Booth's rooms for?"

"Why, goldarn his stuck up picter; he asked me to come an' see him."

"When?"

"Last night, b'gosh."

"Where?"

"Why, up tu my hotel. Why, rot his cussed sassiness—I paid for a big feed for him last night."

"You did. Where?"

"Up tu the hotel; me an' my partners."

"Now look here, my friend; the best thing you can do is to go somewhere in a cool, quiet place, and put your head in soak," said the officer.

"What for—cos it's hurt?" asked Josh, feeling of it.

"Yes, hurt pretty bad, I think. Oh, you can feel it with your hand." The fact is, you are away off your base, young fellow."

"How so?"

"Why, do you really believe that you saw Edwin Booth last night?"

"In course I du. Think I'm a darned fule."

"That's just exactly what I do think you, if you are in earnest, for Edwin Booth was in Pittsburg last night, only arriving here at ten o'clock, so you are either a fool, or have been fooled."

"Wal," mused Josh, "he acts darned funny."

"And why shouldn't he? Oh, go and tie yourself to a lamp-post and catch flies," said the officer, walking away.

Josh looked after him a moment, and then walked slowly towards the hotel.

"Catch flies, hey!" he muttered; "wal, I'll be gold-darned, if I haven't caught 'em most everything else since I've been out with this show an' maybe I orto catch a few flies to change my luck. Now, I wonder if that darned patent cider got into my head last night, an' made me dream all this? If not, what in thunder's ther matter with me anyway, b'gosh? Either I'm a darned crazy fule, or I arn't; an' if I arn't, what's the matter? Wal, b'gosh, I guess I give it up. But I've got to git a new hat an' coat. This is the alfiddest business for wearin' out clus that ever I hearn tell on. This is 'bout ther sixth suit I've had inside of three months, b'gosh; and as for hats, I've had 'bout a dozen, I guess."

Cogitating thus, he proceeded to replenish his battered wardrobe, after which he went to a barber and had some of the outward evidences of his recent misfortune expunged, and then went to the hotel.

But Suckerbait and the others avoided him. Indeed it was feared that the sell would become so general known that there would be a bad falling off in the house that night, even if that was the worst of it, and so they didn't care to be seen by anybody.

He went to Miss Vandevere's room, but even she pretended to be out, as did the other ladies of the company, and so the poor fellow was left to his own company and reflections; but naturally he sought the theater, expecting to find somebody there.

There he chanced to find Dick Dingle. He was evidently trying to lay low, not knowing what might turn up from his ambitious and presumptuous doings, but to save his life he could not help laughing when he saw Josh and understood what his new clothes meant.

"Hello, Dick! Whar's everybody?" he asked.

"Give it up. Some off to ride, I guess; but, I say, where did you connect with the new clothes?"

"Oh, up here. Like 'em?"

"Splendid."

"Wonder whar the colonel is?"

"Working up the house for to-night, I guess. Big house we had last night, eh?"

"Yes," replied Josh, abstractedly.

"And that supper?" See the account of it in the *Journal* this morning?"

"Yes. But, I say, Dick, what did you think of that ere Edwin Booth?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation and reflection.

"Well, he is a great actor, without doubt, but somewhat eccentric; I suppose like all great geniuses."

"Wal, I should say so!"

"Why?"

"Why! Yer know how he torked at supper last night."

"Yes."

"Wal, I called on him a little while ago an' I'll be gold-darned if he didn't kick me out, b'gosh," said he earnestly.

"Kicked you out?"

"Wal, his goldarned Irish servant did; an' he swore he didn't know, an' never seen me afore. What do you make of it?"

" queer; but it is one of the idiosyncrasies of genius I suppose."

"I—do—o—what?" exclaimed Josh, starting.

"Idiosyncrasies," replied Dick, looking sober.

"What in thunder's that?"

"Relating to the idiosyncratic."

"Yer don't tell me!"

"Oh, yes."

"Wal, I don't care a darn what yer call it, or if yer give it a name as long as a parlor car, but I got kicked out an' locked up for duin just what he told me to do last night."

"Very extraordinary," mused Dick.

"Wal, I should say so, b'gosh."

"Perhaps he was mad because it was published in the papers. He's very sensitive about such things."

"Wal, he did say something bout it, now I think it over. He war readin ther paper."

"That's it. He didn't want it in the papers."

"But he said it was a darned lie; that he was in Pittsburg at ther time or on his way from there; an' Muf saye he saw him get off ther train this mornin'."

"Impossible."

"Wal, everybody seems to swear that it is so, and I'll be goldarned to goldarnation if I understand it anyhow. Either he's crazy or I am, b'gosh," he added, emphatically.

"Oh, he probably woke up with an ugly head on him this morning and didn't want to see you or anybody else, and he keeps a cannon to fire out anybody he don't want to see."

"Wal, I'll bet a cookie he won't get a chance to practice on me agin right away."

"And besides that, Josh, he is a dreadfully jealous man," said Dick, speaking lower.

"Oh, he is, hey?"

"Yea. Hates everybody who comes anywhere near him in the business. See?"

"Oh, ho! I understand," said Josh, looking up with sudden earnestness and which Dick encouraged by seeming to understand. "He hearn me spout last night?"

"Yea. Follow the idea?"

"An' knowed I was bound to make a hit when I showed up."

"Of course."

"And he got jealous. Wal I'll be gold-darned. Fust its old Suckerbait, now it's Edwin Booth," and he laughed heartily at the idea.

"You catch the idea exactly. But don't say a word about it so that it will get back to his ears. All you have got to do is to keep right on as you are going. But if I were you, I would take one of the parts in our play, *Staves*, for instance, and by playing it you will not only be able to save the expenses of one man, but

you will all the time be learning stage business and get used to appearing before the footlights, a thing of great importance to you in the future."

"That's so, I'll do it, b'gosh; I'll send Martin home Saturday night an' take his part," said he, delightedly.

"And if the Colonel kicks, just tell him that you have got as much to say as he has," added Dick, in a whisper.

"Wal, yn bet I will," and so it was arranged.

But of course Josh had to tell Miss Vandevere about Booth's jealousy of him, although he did not tell her half so much as she already knew, and it was the source of a quiet laugh which lasted many a day.

The story of the Booth imposition got abroad it is true, but not enough to keep away a passable house that night, although there was no money in it for banking purposes. But on Saturday night the house was almost empty when it should have been the best of the week, and of course everybody played without spirit.

Things looked blue, and when Josh informed Colonel Suckerbait that he proposed to send Martin back to New York and take his character himself, he made no objections, for he was very blue and also very anxious to get out of Louisville, where he concluded that his smartness had overreaped itself.

Well, from there they went to Lexington, where they were billed for three nights, and although it took all the money they had made in Louisville to pay the expenses of the week, Suckerbait felt better after he had got away from it, and Joshua Sheepshanks felt chuck full of life at the prospect of becoming an active member of the company, by which he would learn much that would aid him when he should bolt out to startle the world and Edwin Booth in tragedy.

At the suggestion of Miss Vandevere, he took the stage name of Malcom Darnley, a name that he could make immortal thereafter in tragedy, but which he could accustom himself, the public, and the profession to while serving this apprenticeship.

And he took to it in all earnestness on that account, and because she thought it right, for the height of his ambition was to make her proud of him so that she would condescend to become his bride.

As for the Booth racket, he did not tumble to it. To him it was simply a mystery, or a thing with that long name Dick had given it, and of course the members of the company were not going to give it away, when so much depended on him, both for amusement and for salaries.

They opened in Lexington Monday night, and so well had the town been billed, or "Williamd," as they call it, that there was a good house and things looked lovely again.

But with some people it is a sign of a storm when things look altogether lovely, and Colonel Suckerbait was one of those people.

Josh Sheepshanks, or "Malcom Darnley," was to make his first appearance, and although there had been no rehearsal on account of it, Suckerbait had taken much pains with him in instructing him in the part and the stage business, which he should have known thoroughly by that time anyway.

It wasn't much of a part anyway, and almost anybody could have got through with it, and Josh poo-pooed the idea of rehearsing it so much, when he aspired hopefully to larger parts.

But this wasn't the only trouble there was in store for Suckerbait, for Dick Dingle was feeling first rate; but at the same time he thought Josh had suffered enough for awhile and that somebody else ought to have a turn.

In this belief he put up a job with a police officer, to whom he had told the Booth racket at Louisville, and they agreed to work it out the next day, at the colonel's expense.

But to return to the play, that first night in Lexington, and Josh's first legitimate appearance as an actor.

To tell the truth, both Dick and Miss Vandevere wanted to see him succeed well enough to not hurt the piece, which was now running smoothly, and did all they could to help him, although he laughed at the idea of this anxiety.

Finally the cue was given for him to go on, and speak the lines belonging to the scene. Miss Angie was on the stage at the time, but as the moment arrived for him to go on, he, as hundreds of better men have done, forgot every word he had to speak.

Suckerbait, however, shoved him off, at the same time whispering the first line to him, it being: "Miss Angeline, your father orders me to escort you back to the convent;" but even though it had been whispered in his ear as he went on, he got it mixed up and rendered it something like this: "Angie—yer pa says—says—says it's time—time to go to schule," and with such evident confusion and stage fright that the audience saw at a glance how it was with him and gave him a laugh and some mock applause, while Suckerbait was furious.

But Miss Vandevere got him out of the first scrape by saying: "Ah, he orders me back to the convent?" and had he not forgotten his lines entirely he might have got on from that point, but he had, and simply said "yes" in reply.

In vain Suckerbait prompted him: it was no go, and Miss Vandevere was obliged to partially speak the lines of both parts in order to finish the scene, which she did quite nicely, and hurried him off the stage.

Dick and several others hurried to congratulate him on his success while the colonel was too busy at the moment to give his opinion, for the play had to go on, and so did he in the next scene.

Josh could scarcely collect himself even then, and was not sure but he had actually rendered his lines and the business of the scene, and that the congratulations from his fellows were genuine.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Harry Pratt.

"Why, of course," added Dunellen.

"Go it, old man; you'll make *Staves* the part of the piece yet," added Dick, shaking his hand.

"That's all right, b'gosh," replied Josh, walking away with some pomposity, although not wholly at ease respecting his success.

But at the end of the act, Suckerbait went for him red hot, giving him the emphatic truth, and calling him anything but an actor. This of course made him feel rather foolish, but Dick assured him on the sly that it was only the old man's jealousy, and encouraged him to do better in his next scene.

And, indeed, he did manage to remember the most of his words, although there was an alarming "business" failure on his part. But he got through with it after a fashion, giving some hopes of being able to manage the part after a while, and although Suckerbait was disgusted, the others gave him big encouragement and told him to "go in."

But Suckerbait was forced to see that it was for the best, if Josh could only manage the part, for it not only saved expense, but gave him something to do that would keep him out of mischief. And so he trained him some more the next day, and Miss Vandevere encouraged him all she could.

The next night there was a very fair house, for Dick Dingle had again made a hit in his character of *Jeremy Clip*, in the afterpiece, and hundreds went to see that without caring much for the principal piece, although it was admitted that the ladies were beautiful and played their parts well.

But although Josh had done considerably better, he yet gave himself away to the audience as a greenhorn, and got laughed at for his reward, which somehow made him believe that he was either not a great actor after all, or that he lacked experience. He just got a glimpse of what many others have seen to their sorrow—that acting required an apprenticeship as well as all other professions.

Just as the curtain went up on the last act of *The Bride*, a policeman came in at the stage door and inquired for Colonel Suckerbait very seriously.

Now Dick Dingle was on hand to play his part, which he did of course by appearing to be the friend of his manager, and so inquired his business.

"I have an order for his arrest," said the officer, also understanding his part.

"Might I ask for what?"

"For obtaining money under false pretenses in that he fooled the people of Louisville by pretending that Edwin Booth occupied a private box at the theater, when in reality it was a fraud, against which the said Booth complains and seeks justice."

"I will see if I can find the colonel," said Dick; and he started to do so.

But Suckerbait had overheard it all, as they intended he should, and was in a great state of excitement when Dick found him.

"Well, tell him," said he, after talking the matter over for a few moments, "that I will esteem it a great favor if he will allow me to finish my part, after which I will accompany him," but at the same time he secretly resolved to do nothing of the kind.

So after Dick had reported to the office, he told Suckerbait that the proposition was agreed to, provided he would not attempt to escape. But he told Dick that he should hide himself in a big property chest the moment he had completed his part, and for him to take charge of the stage during the afterpiece.

Well that was just what he did, and Dick took thy key after locking him into the chest, which was ample large for his accommodation.

Then the officer appeared upon the scene and began to storm around in quest of Suckerbait, saying what terrible things he would do because he had forfeited his word of honor, all of which was pleasant for the old man to overhear.

However, he waited around until the afterpiece was done and the audience had gone, when he again became demonstrative and threatened to levy upon the wardrobe belonging to Suckerbait as security for his coming to the front.

Dick and others (not in the racket) protested against this, but to no purpose.

"This is a wardrobe chest, so I am informed by the janitor," said he, pointing to the chest in which Suckerbait was confined, "and I shall take it to the station house and keep it until he shows up."

Was Suckerbait in agony when he heard this? Well, somewhat. A fit of the cramps or some double distilled rheumatism in adult doses would have been luxuries compared with it.

He overheard many protests from Dick and others, but all to no effect, and so the big chest was loaded on a truck—he being nearly suffocated—and taken away; but where to he hadn't the slightest idea, although he supposed to the police station.

At all events, he was dumped somewhere, and then all was silent for a long time, how long he did not know, but it seemed an age to him. Would he smother and die in that awful predicament? Oh, confound the whole thing, why did he ever resort to that Booth fraud?

Presently there was a noise. He listened. It was evident that somebody was near him. Should he kick and make his presence known, and thereby, perhaps, save his life? He had about made up his mind to do so when he heard something being applied to the lock of the chest, and heard voices using words belonging to cracksmen only, and thus he thought that burglars were at work wherever he might be.

The next instant there was a break and the lid of the chest was lifted up, and the rays of a dark lantern were turned upon the contents. He was nearly paralyzed, but he heard a scream and a rush, after which he got up and found himself alone in the darkness.

Where was he? What had happened? The effect of the fresh air, however, revived him after a moment's delay, and then he got out of his prison, feeling his way

by clinging to the edges of the chest.

Finally, he remembered his match safe, and with trembling hands he struck a light. He gazed wildly around as the match increased its light, and finally saw that he was still behind the scenes, and not a foot removed from where he was when he had been locked into the wardrobe chest.

What did it mean?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE position in which Colonel Suckerbait found himself after the supposed burglars had burst open the chest in which he had secreted himself, and whom he had undoubtedly frightened away, can easily be understood.

More easily by the reader, however, than by the victim, for although he saw that he was yet behind the

when he should see his name in letters, five feet long, and the world note his every movement, while Dick Dingle and two or three congenial friends, one of whom was the night clerk of the hotel, were wishing for Suckerbait to turn up.

They had good reason to wait, having just now, in the guise of burglars, released him from the chest. Finally, abject and wild looking, he made his appearance among them.

He was undoubtedly surprised at seeing them up so late, while they pretended to be also surprised at seeing him at all that night.

"Ah! did they let you go?" asked Dick, the first to speak as Suckerbait approached them.

"They couldn't hold you, could they," asked the clerk, looking much in earnest.

"No, that's all right. They found they had bitten off more than they could chew and so let me go. But

say, over most infernally rough pavements, and finally took me into what I supposed was the station house."

"Yes," said Dick, listening eagerly.

"And after tipping the chest over half a dozen times, standing me first on my head and my feet, they ceased and I was left alone."

"Yes," said Dick, listening eagerly.

"Well, I naturally expected to be liberated from that predicament and placed in a cell. But those who had brought me there, or who had given me that terrible ride went away, and I was left alone and in darkness, although so badly flummoxed up that I scarcely knew whether I was dead or alive."

"But they hadn't the key, you know."

"Oh, confound the key! I was not in the station house at all," he exclaimed.

"Yes, so you told me."



The next instant there was a break and the lid of the chest was lifted up and the rays of a dark lantern were turned upon the contents. He was nearly paralyzed, but he heard a scream and a rush, after which he got up and found himself alone in the darkness.

scenes of the Lexington Opera House, the mystery of the whole thing so confused him that he allowed the match he had struck to go out and again leave him in the darkness before thinking to light another or look for a gas bracket.

But he finally lighted another, and by that time having recovered sufficient strength and presence of mind, he sought a gas jet over the "Prompt Box" and proceeded to light it.

Then he looked around and listened.

He walked around to see if there was anybody about. He lighted still another jet and went to the stage door.

It was open!

Where was the janitor?

He glanced at his watch.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

Everybody was of course asleep, but what did this strange transaction mean?

Where was the officer who had arrested him?—where had he been taken, and how did it happen that he was liberated in such a strange way, only to find himself after all his sufferings and bouncing around, back, again in the same place, where he had been taken from?

And where was Dick Dingle?

At the hotel, probably, thinking that he was a prisoner at the station house.

What a shame; and yet what the deuce does it all mean?

Utterly puzzled, the manager sat down and tried to work out the toughest conundrum he ever tackled in his life. It floored him.

Josh Sheepshank was asleep, dreaming of the time

I shall get square with them," said he, never suspecting that they knew all about it.

"It will serve them right," said Dick.

"And I congratulate you," said another.

"That's all right, Dick. Come up to my room,"

said he, starting to go.

The conspirators swapped winks and Dick started to follow him.

Arriving there, and when all alone, Suckerbait proceeded to question Dick and to tell him about the queer experience he had gone through since he had locked him into that chest.

"And were they really burglars?" asked Dick.

"Why, to be sure."

"Then it was a most fortunate fuke, and I congratulate you on your unexpected deliverance."

"Yes, that's all right, but how in thunder is it anyhow? You saw me hide in the wardrobe chest?"

"Yes."

"And saw that the officer tumbled to it soon after you locked me in?"

"Yes."

"You saw him send for help?"

"Yes."

"And cart the box away?"

"Yes."

"The box in which I was locked?"

"Yes, and of which I still have the key," said he, producing it.

"Well, here is what I cannot understand about the confounded thing. They put me on a dray?"

"Yes, so they did."

"And they carted me for at least two miles, I should

"I was back in the very place where I started from."

"Wonderful!"

"Well, after waiting there for an hour or more those burglars came."

"Gracious me!"

"I heard their stealthy approach. What to make of it of course, I did not know, but I thought at first that they were about to liberate me, for which I was very thankful. Indeed, I did not know but you had given them the key."

"No, here it is," said Dick, again showing it.

"True, but the thought came to my troubled mind. I saw an occasional gleam of light through the cracks in the old chest."

"How fortunate that you did not speak."

"Yes, and indignation alone prevented me from doing so. But had I done so, it certainly would have frightened them away and I should not have been liberated for heaven knows how long. I heard a jimmy inserted under the hasp and then there was a rip, a break, and one of them threw up the cover of the chest while yet another directed the rays of a dark lantern full upon me."

"What a dramatic picture," suggested Dick.

"Well, rather, but you should have seen that picture change the instant their eyes fell on me," said he, laughing.

"Oh, I'd bet on it," replied Dick.

"I started, of course, and by the same token you may bet they dusted out of that. They more than likely thought they had been suspected and this plot laid to catch them, and they dusted," he added, again laughing.

"It certainly must have been comical."
 "Yes; confoundedly comical," replied the colonel, glancing at Dick furtively. "Very funny, but that does not square the bill."

"How so?"
 "That was a job,"
 "A job?"
 "Yes, sir. The whole business was a farce—a put-up act on me; and are you dead sure that you know nothing about it?" he asked, squarely confronting Dick.

"Why, of course, I know as much about it as you do. I saw the officer, as you did. You got into the wardrobe chest, and when they could not find you, they tumbled to it and took you off. Of course I know all about that," replied Dick.

"But I tell you it was a job."
 "Well, it certainly does look a little like one."

The worst he dreaded, however, was that it should get out among the troupe, and his acquaintances. If it did, he felt certain that he would never hear the last of it; that it would follow him to his cold and unventilated tomb.

But he finally fell asleep, and it was nearly noon before he opened his eyes to remembrance again. He got out of bed slowly, for he found that he was exceedingly stiff and sore from the usage he had received the night before, and as he hobbled into his breeches and struggled with his other garments, he ground his teeth and swore eternal vengeance on the authors of that iron-clad practical joke.

Reluctantly he went down stairs, although he tried to appear all right and not to show any of the effects of the joke, but not a soul did he see whom he knew and only a few people anyway, it being business hours and everybody away.

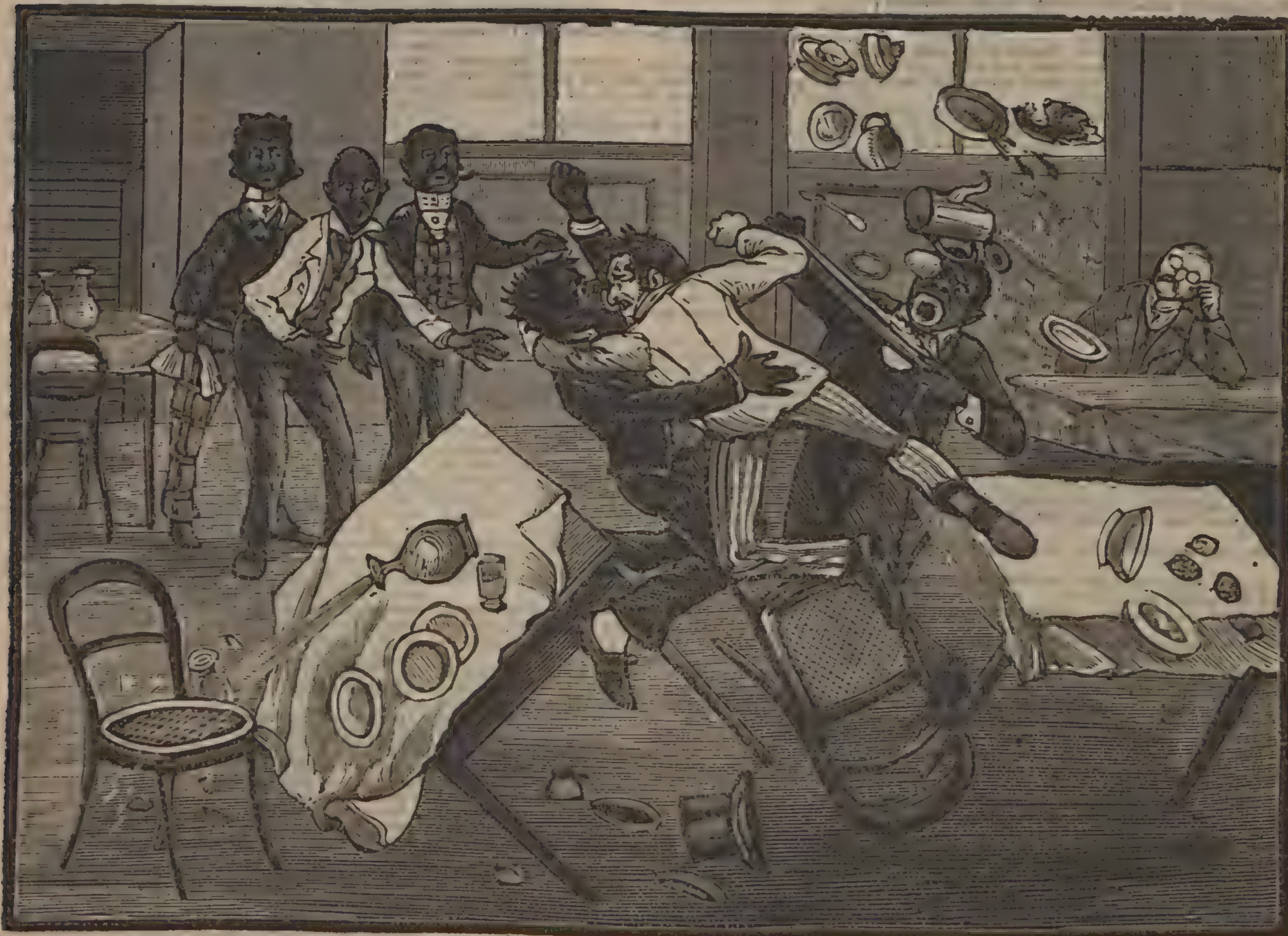
Not a solitary name was given but his own; and the way it was worked up, it was a full grown wonder why the whole city was not agog and trying to find the hero of the racket.

He looked as black as the waiter when that grinning man and brother approached and began to lay out the table, and himself, at the same time—for a fee.

"Nice day, Mr. Suckerbait," he began, as he dexterously placed the dishes before him. "Had mighty nice time last night, I guess."

"What?" howled Suckerbait.
 "Beg pardon, sah," but about dat scrape dat's in de paper dar," he said, apologetically.

Those stars represent a row with the accompanying language. There were at that time more waiters than custom-



Two tables were overturned; one breakfast mingled with the ruins. First there was a white man and then a black man on top, while a big rush of other black men to the spot made the scene one of unexampled liveliness, if not of festivity.

"And if you had no hand in it, there must be somebody on the police force who knows about that Booth racket and put this job up on me. But I'd give a cool hundred to know who it is," he added.

"So would I,"
 "Dick?"
 "What?"
 "Now own up," said Suckerbait, seriously.
 "To what?"

"Why, that you either put up this job or knew something about it."

"Colonel, that settles it," said Dick, rising and going toward the door.

"What's the matter?"
 "Well, matter enough, I think, when you accuse me of playing a trick like that on you. Good-morning. I shall go to bed," and in spite of all Suckerbait could do or say, he left the room, evidently, highly indignant.

But it was nearly daylight, before the colonel could find rest and forgetfulness in sleep.

The more he thought of it, the more firmly did he become convinced that a very huge joke had been played upon him by somebody, and that a policeman figured very conspicuously in it, whether Dick Dingle had a hand in it or not.

But he felt certain that he *did* have. He knew him to be a great and successful practical joker, and what more natural than that he should have some connection with this one?

This he felt convinced of in spite of Dick's fine acting and well shown indignation. He had seen him do the same thing before often, and knew what a consummate actor he was.

The night clerk was not there of course, but the day clerk seemed to be uncommonly pleasant and smiling, although he said nothing that would lead Suckerbait to suspect that he knew anything.

Neither Dick Dingle or any other member of the combination was about. Even his partner, Joshua Sheepshank, was nowhere to be seen, and feeling that the cravings of his stomach required some attention, he went where hunger can be forgotten, a la carte, that is to say, if you have got the money.

The waiter took his order and bought a morning paper, it being understood in the most of these feederies that a customer has a plenty of time to read a paper through, even to the advertisements, while waiting for his order to be filled.

Colonel Suckerbait felt rather pleased than otherwise, because he saw no one around, and so he spread himself out, and then spread out his paper.

Foreign or political news didn't bother him at all, and so he skipped it. But almost the first thing he saw under the head of Domestic Intelligence, was a headline like this:

A BADLY SOLD MANAGER.

Suckerbait started at this, for he felt that if there was a badly sold manager, he was that moaning individual.

Adjusting his glasses he proceeded to read a finely cooked up account of what had really happened to him, and before he had got half way through it, his appetite was gone.

Murder was in his heart as the waiter returned with his breakfast, for the ingenious writer of the account had worked it up with all the possible fun there was in it, if not "to the queens' taste."

ers present, and waiters, whether black or white, generally stick to each other.

What words were spoken up to a certain point have been given; those that followed are included in the stars.

Two tables were overturned; one breakfast mingled with the ruins. First there was a white man and then a black man on top, while a big rush of other black men to the spot made the scene one of unexampled liveliness, if not of festivity.

But when they pulled the principals out of the ruin they had wrought, and tried to dissuade Colonel Suckerbait from a love of that waiter's black ear, and kicked the aforesaid waiter to convince him that he had gone to the limit in chewing the colonel's nose—that time was called—there was much excitement.

But they were finally separated, and the puffing colonel made his way through the crowd that had collected and started for his room, bent on present seclusion.

Of course law and the police was talked of by that enterprising waiter, but he had a boss, in the person of the head waiter, who saw a chance for the gathering of wampum. So he quieted the underling with the partially masticated auriculars and took things in his own hands.

He visited Colonel Suckerbait with hunks of condolence and apology, but suggested that the whole business might be hushed up by the transfer of sundry shekels, and no more of the unfortunate affair ever be heard of.

The colonel was at this moment trying to bring his smelter back into its original shape by the aid of court-plaster, and he was not in a very graciously ne-

gotiating mood. He still wanted insanguinary libations. But the head waiter was a man of nerve, and limitless assurance in negotiation.

But for this they might have fought, even in the colonel's own room, but that cream-colored head waiter was a diplomat.

Well, the result of their negotiations with Suckerbait, still sore and belligerent, was that he gave that head waiter fifty tickets for the show that night, admitting to the first balcony, the real limit to colored people, and he did it to put a stop to all further trouble, and through the head waiter it had the desired effect.

But wasn't Suckerbait mad? Such conundrums are not worth guessing!

It was nearly dark before he put in an appearance at the theater, having in the meantime got a meal at a cheap restaurant.

The plaster on his snoot was very visible, although he knew that he could make up so as not to attract the attention of the audience.

But there was nobody at the theater at this time, so he sat down on that self-same chest, and while smoking a cigar, indulged in a retrospect of what had happened within twenty-four hours.

But little by little he became calm, as he sat there and smoked, and before he knew it, the doors were opened and a crowd of people began to crowd in for private seats.

Even before the company arrived he looked out at the "peep-hole" in the curtain and saw that the indications were for a big house, and then he began to be himself again.

Josh Sheepshank was the first to put in an appearance behind the scenes, and he welcomed him with unusual heartiness, simply because he was the first one to break up his reflections.

"Colonel, do I look at ye?" he asked, grinning.

"I guess so. Why?"

"I've been all over town to-day tryin' to find yu. I hearn yu was in trouble."

"Nonsense! Never was happier in my life," replied Suckerbait, placidly.

"But how 'bout that thing last night?"

"Oh, that was all a mistake. The police were on a wrong scent and apologized handsomely," said he, pulling at his cigar.

"And that row in the restaurant?"

"What row?"

"I hearn people talkin' 'bout it."

"Don't mind what you hear, Josh."

"But how 'bout the coons that are fillin' the first circle?"

"Oh, well, they have a right to come in if they want to."

"But the ticket taker tells me they are all comin' in on free passes, issued by you."

"All right, pard. Don't I know what's hunk and what's no good?"

"Yes; but there's a big crowd outside."

"Well, we can hold them, pard."

"I must say it looks a little queer. But maybe you are all right," he added, turning away.

"Of course I am," replied Suckerbait.

Josh saw Angella Vandevere coming in, and went to meet her. She had an uncommon smile on, although it did not seem to be for him, and when Dick Dingle, Billy Pratt and the others came in, the smile grew broader, for it was evident that there was going to be a big house and undoubtedly on account of the publication of the great sell on manager Suckerbait.

The house filled up rapidly and the company got together as usual, although Suckerbait, after he had "made up," kept wholly to himself and did not show the good nature of his company, nor did he know what fun they were having at his expense.

But there was a big house occasioned by the story of the sell at his expense, and although he suspected as much, he was inclined to be reconciled.

And it seemed that every waiter in Lexington was there with his wife or his best girl. It required extra gas, or it would have done so had it not been for the luminosity of the diamonds they wore.

Finally the curtain was rung up and the play begun. The coons were delighted.

As for Josh Sheepshank, he had got so he could go through his part quite well, and was no longer the butt of the audience and the company, as he had been for so long a time before that.

Dick Dingle was feeling, and doing, his best, and every other member of the company, with the exception of Col. Suckerbait, was the same.

But there was a send-off waiting for him, and when he made his appearance. It was only too evident that the audience had "got on" to him without any mistake.

Dick was watching closely, as the other members of the company were.

At first that big audience broke into a good natured laugh, quite out of keeping with the part of a villainous parent that the colonel was playing, and little by little that laughter rose until nothing that was said upon the stage could be heard.

Suckerbait bowed respectfully in the hope of quieting them, but the more he bowed the louder they laughed, until the Opera House was a regular pandemonium.

"Speak! Speak!" was cried.

"Three cheers for Colonel Suckerbait!" one or two others shouted, and amid the confusion the cheers were loudly given.

The play was as badly broken up as its author was, and the actors began to wonder if they would ever get a chance to be heard.

Finally the curtain was rung down, and the cries still continuing, Suckerbait went in front of it, only to be received with an augmentation of applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I suppose I know the cause of your mirth, and probably the best thing I can do is to acknowledge the corn, trusting that nothing but mirth and pleasure will accompany you though life," then he retired.

This speech had the desired effect, and the performance was allowed to proceed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Well, the next we hear of our friends is at Cincinnati, Ohio.

It would be almost useless to attempt to depict the sorrow and the sore nose of Colonel Suckerbait during all this time, for during the past week or two he had suffered much, not only from his wounded bugle, but from knowing that his entire combination had got on to the terrible racket of which he had been the victim.

Even Josh Sheepshank, who had until now been the victim of everything that happened, had the laugh on him.

But he kept his temper and maintained his managerial dignity all the while, allowing all to laugh who could and trying to make the best of everything for himself.

Oh, Colonel Suckerbait was a philosopher!

He could feel loss of eyes, which, of course, made him a philosopher; and he had come very near the point of being obliged to feel loss of nose, in which case his philosophy would probably have oozed out at his finger tips, and he would have become a kicker.

But aside from this, everything was going all right, and, although they were doing but little more than paying expenses, spirits were kept up and both the latitude and longitude of everything was kept in a state of equilibrium, and things looked generally lovely.

The first surprise was destined to be given to Joshua Sheepshank, the green but honest son of Puritan New England.

With him, of course, Sunday was sacred, and there was no nonsense to be connected with it.

But when he found that the first night in Cincinnati was to be Sunday, he at once backed water, concluding that a mistake had been made; that Sunday had been put in the place of Monday.

Josh was but little if any better than the generality of mankind, but when it was shown to him that everything was regular; that Sunday in Cincinnati was no better than any other day; that it was there regarded as a day of rest and relaxation, it opened his eyes, although it could not at first get the better of his prejudices.

"I say, Angie," said he, after being convinced that it was all regular, and that Sunday was of all days in the week regarded the best by all show-people, "what do you think of it?"

"Oh, that's all right, Josh; we are getting quite a distance away from New England," said she, archly.

"Wal, I should say so!" he mused. "But how in thunder does it happen, anyway?"

"Well, Josh, it happens that we now come in contact with a more generous and liberal element than we have met with heretofore. The Germans are of the best of which the earth is populated, and they believe that the day of rest, which our Puritanical ancestors and their descendants think ought to be a day of sackcloth and ashes, should be indeed a day of rest; that the body and mind, released from the labor of the week, should relax itself with amusements and music; with rest and refreshments of all rational kinds, so that when the week begins again, the mind and the body may be rested and refreshed for the work that is in store for it."

"Wal, b'gosh, that are seems sorter sensible. But what would our folks say?" said Josh.

"Oh! they would object to it, of course. They would think it dreadful for us to do anything to make the people happy and help rest them."

"Wal, b'gosh, it seems queer," mused Josh.

"Of course! Everything above us seems queer. It would be a miracle for an oyster to see a goose fly, but no miracle for a goose to see such a thing. But, speaking of geese, how do you feel yourself?"

She asked, suddenly changing from the deep philosophy she had been indulging in to the chaff which was quite as natural to her.

Josh looked at her a moment.

What did she mean, anyhow?

Did she regard him as a goose?

"Guse!" he finally exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Who's guse?"

"Why, mine, of course," said she, pinching his arm and making him feel like an eagle.

"Oh! b'gosh, I feel fast rate. But, say, how 'bout that?" he asked, reflectively.

"What?"

"Why; you'n I."

"Strain it."

"How?"

"Make it clearer."

"Oh! Wal, 'bout our gettin' married."

"Ob, pahaw! said she, pettishly, but smiling.

"Shaw! What's he got to do with it?"

"No, no. But just think how nice we are getting along now—single," said she, giving the poor fellow one of her mashing smiles.

"Wal, now, b'gosh, Angie, that's all very well, but I'm sorter uneasy."

"Nonsense!"

"But, somehow, yu seem to cotton to that are Dunellen," said Josh.

"Oh, you are always jealous of him."

"Wal, maybe I wouldn't be if yu'd let me put my arm round yu're waist sam's yu do him. Gol darn my buttons, but it took all my Christian fortitude to keep from punchin him in the nose ther other night on

board ther train, when yu lay yu're head down on his shoulder and went to sleep."

"Well, that was all right,"

"Oh, it was, eh?" exclaimed Josh.

"To be sure it was."

"How so?"

"Why, because yu were not there to take his place. Oh, pshaw! I am not going to be fool enough to tell you how much I wanted you—how long I looked for you, and I will not allow you to question me, because I finally went to sleep on Dunellen's shoulder. You should be ashamed of yourself, Josh," she added, with nice dramatic pouting.

"Why?" he asked, somewhat broken up.

"Why, where were you?"

Josh attempted to explain.

"Oh, I understand all about it. You were in the smoking-car with the others, playing poker, never thinking of me."

"Oh, Angie!"

"Don't give any honey-bee savings! you are a fraud. You thought more of poker than you did of me or my comfort, and now you have the megatherian cheek to blame me for simply resting my tired head on Dunellen's shoulder," and she turned away as though to do a little weeping business, which broke Josh all up as usual.

"Wal, now, Angie, we'll turn over a new leaf. I'm arter yu every step from this out," said he, seizing her hand.

"No; you like poker better than you do me, and if you don't mind I'll marry Dunellen or somebody else just to spite you."

"Oh, Angie, don't do it!" he cried; but as Dick Dingle and Dunellen came upon them just then, it broke up the little confab.

The Sunday performance was a great success, although it was hard for Josh to reconcile himself to it. It knocked his New England education all endwise, but it filled the till all the same, and sent week-days higher than a kite.

The week's business in Cincinnati was very good, although the expenses were large, and Josh was putting a little color into the pipe of experience every day. But in spite of all, he could not escape Dick Dingle and his tricks.

However, there had been no great practical joke played for some time, and things were going exceedingly well with everybody.

But Josh got it again the last night in Cincinnati, all the same.

In the part of Staver that he played, he had to carry on a valise which he opened to take out a disguise for one of the other characters, the heroine, played by Miss Vandevere.

Josh had grown to be less cock-sure of astonishing the world by bursting upon it as a great tragedian some day. He was learning, what others have to learn, that it isn't such an easy thing to become a great actor, and, to tell the truth, he was losing a little of his original faith in himself and the love once so strong for the profession. Indeed, had it not been for Miss Vandevere, and the hopes he had of winning her, he probably would have soured on the whole business.

But he had become a sort of a talking machine, so far as the part he had to play was concerned, for although he got through with it without getting laughed at as at first, everybody could see that there was nothing in him to indicate that he would ever make even a passable actor.

But on the particular night before referred to, he went on with his valise, receiving his cue from Miss Vandevere, and the dialogue thereupon was as follows:

"Ah, Mr. Staver, have you brought the disguise?"

"I have, Miss Angella. It is here in my valise." (Setting it down.)

"Thank goodness! Give it to me at once that I may fly in it to the arms of my loved one, and be free from the tyranny of a cruel parent."

Well, thereupon Staver opens his valise.

It was a pretty little bit, and Miss Vandevere always brought down the house as she snatched the disguise and flung it about herself.

But on this occasion when the valise was opened, out jumped and fluttered a big red rooster, greatly to the amazement of both Josh and Miss Vandevere.

Josh started in such genuine wonder, as she did also, that the audience saw at a glance that something was wrong, and before it could recover from its surprise, the rooster recovered from his, and, flapping his wings, crowed defiantly.

This brought down the house with a vengeance. There was no acting about that; it was nature and no mistake.

Josh attempted to drive the unexpected intruder out at the wing, but instead he promptly made use of his own wings and flew over the footlights, lighting on the bald head of the bass fiddler.

Then the audience shouted louder than ever, and that Dutch double Z agitator knocked him off and he flew into the leader's face.

Then, shaken from there, he tried to find shelter in the big French horn, where he was promptly captured and taken down under the stage.

Josh Sheepshank meantime stood looking at the unexpected performance, while Miss Vandevere made her exit during the confusion.

"Wal, I'll be gosh-darned!" he finally said, and this produced enough additional laughter to enable him to gather up his gripsack and get out.

Fortunately the scene was nearly finished by that time, and Colonel Suckerbait put an end to the business by whistling off the flats, and another scene of the play was begun.

The company behind the scenes were enjoying the fun quite as much as the people in front.

Miss Vandevere understood at once who was re-

sponsible for the joke and although it had done her out of a pretty little scene with its usual applause, yet it had pleased the audience so well that she joined in the laugh.

Josh, however, couldn't see anything. All there was of it to him was a mystery.

"Now, how in thunder did that ere ruster get into that valise, I'd like to know?" was his first inquiry after escaping from the stage.

And it was only natural that the question should be addressed to Dick Dingle, who stood there laughing immoderately.

"He must have crawled in by the keyhole," replied Dick.

"Git out! I guess, b'gosh, somebody put him in there. Yu can't fule me that way."

"Whose bird is it, anyway?" asked somebody.

"It belongs to the janitor," said a scene-shifter.

"Yes, and he thinks you were trying to get away with it," said Harry Pratt.

But a few words from Miss Vandevere did the business, so far as making him yield up the wampum was concerned, for when he demanded a fair and square kiss as a binder to her agreement to marry him (in her mind), she complied, and he weakened.

And yet he wasn't wholly happy. It looked as though he wasn't to make a big fortune out of this investment. Already the larger portion of the ten thousand dollars that he had put into the concern against Suckerbait's talent, reputation, and genius had been eaten up in one way and another, and still the prospect seemed none the brighter.

Joshua Sheepshank was blue.

Business was not good at St. Louis, although they managed to pay expenses pretty nearly, and from here, taking warning by other company managers, who reported business bad further west, it was resolved to organize again; abandon the route that had been fixed up to extend clear across the continent,

none of the shows on the road are paying this year. There are too many of them, but if we go further south we shall not only strike better weather but better times and get off the general route of showmen."

"I wish, b'gosh, I'd stayed at home and never got onto the route anyway."

"Oh, you have got a touch of the blues, Josh."

"Touch on 'em! Wal, I should remark that I hed. Any man'll have a touch of the blues when he gets so he can't touch money."

"That's all right, dear boy," said Suckerbait, slapping him on the shoulder.

"No, I'll be goldarned if it is. Though I haven't got five hundred dollars left, and if things don't change we shall all get left, and I've commenced for a good kicker, b'gosh."

And a kicker he remained; a kicker from Kickapoo Business grew steadily worse, but Josh held on to tha



When the valise was opened, out jumped and fluttered a big red rooster, greatly to the amazement of oth Josh and Miss Vandevere.

"Yes, sir; and he has gone for an officer," added Dick, trying to look serious.

"Git out!"

"You are the one who had better get out. If I were you I'd skip."

"What for?"

"Well, this is our last night, and that old janitor is just mean enough to make you trouble, so that you'll pay to get out of it."

"That's so," they all said.

"Git out!" muttered Josh.

But his part was done with, and there was nothing to prevent him from going if he wanted to.

So they watched him on the sly, and saw him in a very few moments slide out of the stage door and vanish, to the great relief of Miss Vandevere, whom he tried to escort home every evening.

Then, of course, there was another laugh all round, and Dick Dingle had added another to the long list of his practical jokes.

Josh did not show up again until the company was on its way out of town, then he got unmercifully geyed.

The week at Chicago was a disastrous one, owing to bad weather and superior attractions, and the result was that they skipped the town a thousand dollars poorer than they entered it.

Of course they had lots of fun; for of all places on top of this changing ball for fun, Chicago lassoes the cake.

But it proved a rough place for Josh, for he not only got led into a bunco snap for about three hundred dollars, which of course did not make him feel very amiable, but when he had to go down into his pockets still further to make good on business, it nearly broke his heart.

and return to New York by taking a more southerly tier of towns.

Yes, things looked a little queer to the members of the Great Combination—that is to say, the salaried portion of it; and they all felt better when they found their faces turned eastward again, recognizing the fact that every stand took them so much nearer home, in case a collapse befell them.

But, amid all this, Colonel Suckerbait would not let it be seen that he had any doubts regarding the golden future, although there can be no question but that he saw that he was doomed to go as he always had gone in his managerial attempts.

"Oh, it's all right, dear boy, all right!" he would say, assuringly to his partner; "you are green in the business yet."

"Yes, b'gosh, I guess I am," growled Josh.

"You see yourself that business is unexpectedly dull, but before we get back to New York, over the new route I have laid out, we will have our money all back again and more too."

"We'll have our money all back! Guess you've got yers all back now, drawing fifty dollars a week out of my money," replied Josh, bitterly.

"Four money?"

"Yes, b'gosh."

"That was our money, dear boy. You put it in as your share of the enterprise."

"Rot blast ther darned enterprise. It is a skin, a darned skin! Where's my ten thousand dollars? All gone in thunder and the pesky show hasn't paid expenses since we started it."

"Oh, well, dear boy, you will find that'll be all right by the time we get back to New York. The fact is,

last five hundred dollars like grim death.

Salaries were not paid, and hardly enough money was taken to pay other expenses, and a glum looking combination that was. Those who had saved a little of their money when things were flush, were now obliged to use it for absolute necessities. But Josh wasn't going to pour any more sugar into that rat-hole.

Finally they were going to a large town in which there had not been a show in a long time, and the prospect was good, provided they had a few hundred dollars to pay for printing, license, and hall hire.

Josh was for giving up the whole snap and getting back to New York as best they could. He had money enough to get Angle and himself back, but he didn't seem to care a snap for the others.

Finally Dick Dingle came to the front in the emergency. Not with money but with an original scheme for getting that out of Josh Sheepshank. It was a seemingly desperate resort, but the company fell in with it, agreeing to help carry it out.

It was nothing, short of coming the train robber dodge on him, and so of course there had to be some understanding with the conductor of the train on which they were going to ride.

Josh was getting to be very mean by this time. He would take himself and the ladies into a first-class car, and allow the others to ride second class, or walk if they didn't like that. This enabled him to be more with Miss Vandevere, and to keep Dunellen away from her.

And this of course did not please her worth a cent, as she and Dunellen were engaged to marry, and she had got tired of tolerating Josh to assist Colonel Suckerbait bleed him, or for what he gave her. So it

is not surprising that she fell into the racket and helped do her share in carrying it out.

But in order to carry it out successfully, the other members of the combination must ride in the same car with Josh and the ladies, and this they just managed to do and nothing more.

It was a long, lone some night ride, and at a certain station all the other passengers in the car with one or two exceptions got out, and the train continued on.

But it had proceeded only a short distance when two masked and ferocious looking men entered the car, each flourishing a pair of pistols.

"Hold up your hands!" roared one of them, and they both proceeded to cover the men.

"Oh, mercy!" shrieked Miss Vandevere. "Train robbers!" and there was instantly great excitement manifested.

Josh knew he had nearly the only money in the party, and he knew he wanted to keep it, too, so, exclaiming "B'gosh!" he slid down under the seat and tried to hide under Angie's cloak.

This was fortunate for the robbers, for now that he was out of sight, they only had to conduct their mock robbery—the going through of passengers in search of valuables—in an audible way, so he could hear all, and it was a fine piece of acting, the way they worked it.

Finally Dick Dingle, made up to look the fiercest robber of the two, approached the hiding place.

"Come up out of that yar, stranger, or I shall have yer let some light in among yer brains an' things," said he, uncovering and "covering" him at the same time. "Get up! Guess yer ther rooster that's got the money. None ther rest on em got much, an' we never rob ladies."

"Oh, lord!" groaned Josh, as he came slowly up, his hair doing the same thing, and his eyes sticking out like eggs.

Why hadn't he thought to give his money to Miss Vandevere?

"Come, lively now; unkliver that boodle," thundered the robber, and utterly overcome at the sight of that big revolver so near his head, he wilted and flopped back into his seat again.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE last scene didn't close with the chapter, although Josh Sheepshank was almost at the point of total collapse.

"Come out with that boodle!" again roared the supposed train robber, still covering the poor, trembling wretch with his revolver.

"Oh, Lord—av—av—have mercy!" he whined, at the same time crowding as close as possible to Miss Vandevere who pretended to be quite as frightened as he was.

"Give him everything or he will take our lives!" cried Miss Vandevere. "Quick, quick!"

"Oh, lord, oh, lord!" groaned Josh.

"Stand aside there, pard, an let me bore a hole in him!" suggested the other robber.

"I will if he don't shell out before I count ten," and he began to count.

It was a terrible moment for Josh, but by the time eight had been counted, he weakened.

"Here—here it is!" he moaned, handing a roll of bills to the threatening robber.

"Is that all yer got, stranger?"

"Yes," Josh hesitated.

"Oh, sir, please spare him!" pleaded Angelina.

"All right, seem! It's you; come, pard," he added, addressing the other robber, and the two men backed out of the car, with their pistols pointing at the passengers to keep them holding their hands up.

A more successful or a more ridiculous farce was never enacted.

It was successful, but anything save comical to Joshua Sheepshank, however, for to him it was a thing both solemn and earnest.

The other members of the troupe and fellow conspirators sat a moment in well assumed wonder that such things could be, and then they pretended to look from the car windows as though expecting to see the robbers leap off the train.

"Stop 'em!" cried Josh, faintly; then he said the same thing louder.

"Hush! They might return and murder us all," whispered Miss Vandevere.

"Oh, if I only had a pistol, I—"

"Ah! there they go!" said one of the actors. "They just jumped off and took to the woods."

"Yes, an' they took my money along," moaned Josh, as though his heart was breaking.

"Never mind, Josh. We will make it all up at the next stand," said Angie.

"Oh, we will, eh? Wal, I guess not, b' gosh. That was all the money there was in the concern. Now what are we goin' to do?" he demanded.

"Oh, we'll catch on somehow."

"Catch on to ther poor-house, I guess. This must be a darnation queer country, where they let robbers walk right into a car an go through people."

"Well, the thing might not happen again in twenty years," suggested Colonel Suckerbait, who with others had gathered soothingly around the victim.

"Wal b' gosh, once in twenty years is a darned sight too often when it falls on me. Arn't there no way of catchin' the varmints?"

"Might ride over the road fifty or sixty times and not catch them going for you again."

At this point Dick Dingle and Dunellen came into the car at the opposite end from which they had left it, the train having slowed up at a station so as to enable them to do so.

Seeing the company all standing up they went, naturally, to see what the excitement was about.

"Hello, what is it?" asked Dick.

"What is it?" all the actors exclaimed, holding up their hands in dismay.

They were artists in their profession.

"What is it?" asked Josh, with indignant sadness.

"Why, yes; something seems to be the matter, and I simply asked what it is," replied Dick.

"Where have you been?" asked Colonel Suckerbait, who was also doing some good acting.

"Why, Dun and I have been in the smoker."

"Anything happened?" asked Miss Kutejack.

"Nothing in particular. Why?"

"That's it, b'gosh!" exclaimed Josh. "If there's anything happens, I'm ther chap that's got his porridge dish right side up, goldarn it!"

"Why, Dick, we have been visited by train robbers!" exclaimed Miss Vandevere.

"Train robbers?" cried both Dick and Dunellen.

"Yes, b'gosh, and they've cleaned us all out."

"Gracious!"

"Lucky they didn't strike me," said Dick.

"Lucky?"

"Lucky for them."

"Oh, it is dreadful!" put in Miss Vandevere.

"Wal, I reckon! Robbed me of five hundred dollars, clear cash, and all we've got, too, b'gosh, I'll be goldarned if I ever seen such luck as I have," and he seemed on the point of crying over it.

"Oh, don't mind it, Josh," said Dick, while the others were going through with their mock comments on the outrage.

"Never mind! What in thunder be we goin' to do when we get to Nashville?"

"Oh, I have friends there, and I guess we can pull through with their assistance."

"Bah! Friends when yer busted don't mount ter one in a hill, an' little ones at that. I wish I was back hum agin. There goes ther last of the ten thousand dollars I put in. It was a live swindle from the start. Ther show business is a skin."

"Oh, not so bad as that, Josh," said Miss Vandevere.

"Yes, b'gosh, that's just what it is."

"Don't we give the people their money's worth?"

"Wal, maybe we du. But, do the people respond? that's what's the matter, and that's what shows that ther heads is level. I wish I war well out of it. I wish I war back to Vermont. I've had all I want of this sorter fodder. I was a goldarned fule for leavin' a good home and good prospects, to go to that confounded Suckerbait, ground—New York. But I war greener'n half grown apples. I wanted to see the world. I've had it. Now I'm sick," said he, bitterly.

"Oh, no; you've only the blues," said the bewitching Miss Vandevere, placing her hand in his.

"No, I'm sick, Angie; dead sick. I went to New York with ten thousand dollars in cold cash, to make my fortune. What's that cash?—What's that fortune? Du you wonder I'm sick?"

"Oh, brace up, Josh; we'll get out of it all right, I guess," said she.

"No, we're inter it all right; that's what's the matter with our Hannah. But that's one thing, Angie, if it hadn't been for you, I should never have put all that money in. As soon as I got sensible 'nough to know my head from a squash, I seen that old Suckerbait war a skin, an' if it hadn't been for you, I'd go out long ago."

"What, do you lay the whole thing to me?" she demanded, drawing herself haughtily up.

"Wal, yu know I war dead stuck on you, Angie; stuck at first sight, I war bound to go where yu went, and arter yu promised to marry me, I didn't mind ten thousand dollars more'n I did ten cents."

"What's that you say, Mr. Sheepshank?" she demanded, almost angrily.

"Why, didn't yu promise to marry me?" he asked, with a half scared look.

"Yes, on one condition, sir."

"Condition?"

"Yes, that you succeeded in making a hit as a tragedian," said she, laughing.

If Josh had been sick before, he wanted a doctor now.

"But yu said, sometime, only a few days ago," he finally mustered courage to say.

"Sometime never comes, Josh Sheepshank; or if it does, it may be after I am a widow."

He looked at her a moment and then exclaimed:

"Great halliher!"

She bowed, coldly.

"Du yu mean it, Angie?"

"Why, to be sure I do."

"Goldarn my skin!"

"What do you take me for?"

Josh looked at her, but he was silent. His eyes were gradually getting opened like a young kitten's.

"Do you imagine for one moment that I am such a fool as to marry you—at least until you are able to do something for me?"

"Wal, haven't I done somethin' for you, Angie?" he asked, with pathetic indignation.

"Oh, you have bought me a few presents, but what is that in the face of so serious a thing as marriage? Don't be foolish, Josh."

Foolish!

Was he anything?

Yes—a very sick sucker.

But in spite of everything he had one good friend in that combination, Dick Dingle.

True, he had put up the job to rob him of his last remaining five hundred dollars, but it was because it was a case of emergency.

He knew well enough that Nashville was a good show town, and with proper billing they could most undoubtedly mend their fortunes and get on their feet again, whereas without it, all would be lost.

But if they did make a hit, he resolved that Josh should have his money back again; that no advantage should be taken of him, and that if he lost his money at all, it should be squarely and in the enterprise in which he had honestly and innocently set out.

That was the kind of a pork pie Dick Dingle was.

Well, they arrived in Nashville all right, and at once went to a good hotel, greatly to the surprise and wonderment of poor Josh.

What cheek that Suckerbait had.

And when afterwards he saw the posters and other advertisements flaming about, he concluded that Dick had really met some of his friends.

But Josh was a sorrowful man for all that.

It had been agreed between him and Suckerbait that nothing should be said about the robbery in Nashville, for fear it might hurt their credit, although Josh concluded that it would be hard to spoil a rotten egg; in other words that the credit of the concern was just about as bad as it possibly could be, whether anything was said about the robbery or not.

The first night in Nashville was the best one they had had in many a day, fully six hundred dollars being taken in.

But even this did not make Josh happy.

"The week will cut it all up," he said.

But after all, it was not the poor business or the loss of his money that made him feel sick and downcast. It was the loss of his Angelina Vandevere, as he supposed, that broke him up. He wished he had never been born, or that he had remained at home on the farm and married Dolly Dimple, whom his parents said had inherited a fortune lately.

But business remained first rate all the week, leaving them more than a thousand dollars ahead after paying all expenses.

And because Dick Dingle insisted upon it, not because he wanted to do so himself, Suckerbait gave back the five hundred dollars that had been taken from Josh on the train.

"Yes, dear boy, I'll put this back into the old fund again!" said he, bound to swallow the pill as gracefully as possible. "That leaves your money just as it was before the robbery, while I retain the remainder for running expenses."

"Wal, b'gosh, I never expected to shake hands with that again!" said Josh, pocketing it.

"Oh, we'll be all right again soon. But you must of course, use that money, should there be any necessity for doing so, for it belongs to the firm, yu know. I may want some for salaries next week!" said he.

But when Josh was left alone, he counted that money over, and felt of it affectionately.

"Oh, I must give it up for salaries, eh?"

He scattered it around in several pockets, each one of which he slapped with emphatic satisfaction.

"I must, eh? Wal, if I du I'm a steer. If anybody gets that sugar it will be Josh Sheepshank—that is, if he knows himself. Give it up, eh?" and he laughed a tragic laugh and indulged in tragic thoughts all to himself.

At Knoxville they also did a first rate business and once more the "ghost walked," and that combination smiled and was happy.

Even Josh smiled again, for in addition to good business and money in pocket, Angelina had smiled on him again, although he was still uncertain as to whether she would ever consent to marry him or not. But he was ready to forget and forgive, and was himself once more.

Indeed, it is more than likely that he would have given up the five hundred dollars if she had coaxed him to do so real nice. In fact, that was just what Colonel Suckerbait calculated upon when he returned it to him.

But, to tell the truth, she was getting tired of playing stool pigeon for Suckerbait, and plainly told him so when she learned that the money had been returned to Josh.

She did not like him anyhow, and would not have married him if he had been worth a million, and had allowed him to treat her, to make her presents and make love to her, so she could manipulate him to the advantage of the manager.

Now she was heartily sorry for it, for it had gone so far that Josh had become a positive nuisance, especially when she and Dunellen were engaged.

"Oh, but keep him on a string a little while longer, Angie, for we may need that five hundred dollars before we get back to New York. Indeed, it may be absolutely necessary to have it, in order to pay your salary. Just keep him on a string so you can handle him until we can get back to New York, if needs be," said Suckerbait.

"Oh, pshaw! I don't blame the fellow for being sick, for the scheme has proved a terrible open and shut, and to tell you the truth, I haven't the heart to go for him any further, even if I had the disposition. The show, at least, should pay its way."

"Well, we are doing well now, and possibly we may keep on all right, as I hope we shall. But that five hundred dollars belong to the firm, yu know, and if we need it in the business, I don't propose to have him refuse to give it up, as he did before," replied Suckerbait, almost fiercely.

"Better work the train robbery racket on him again," she replied, laughing.

"No, we are getting too far east for that snap," he replied.

"Well, I'll risk it but that your ingenuity will suggest some way of getting it out of him."

"Yes, perhaps," said he, just as calmly as though he was talking of legitimate business; "but you must not desert me if worse comes to worst."

"It surely would be worse coming to worst."

"How so?"

"Because I have fooled him so much that he would never give me the money unless I married him right out and out."

"Oh, but you can keep him on the string, Angie. Don't desert me in an hour of need," he said, pleadingly.

She made him no answer, but when he left her he was not without hope that she would prove true to his interests if a pinch should come.

Angie had as much cheek as any lady of her profession, but she was getting tired of this. Suckerbait had too much gall for her.

But things went on very well, however, and she was not called upon right away.

There had been no practical jokes played on anybody since the train robbery snap, but one day while at the theater, a brilliant idea struck the colored member of the combination, Africanus Muff.

He was not very good at such things, but he could do as much laughing on account of them as any two others, and was always ready to assist any other person in carrying them out.

But this idea was a new one and all his own, although he was obliged to take Dick into his confidence.

In the farce of *The Widow's Victim*, in which Dick played *Jeremy Clip*, there was a "property" wig block used in the barber shop scene, and Dick had occasioned considerable merriment some time before

Henry Pratt and Bill Adams came in soon after the job was put up, and they were, of course, let into it.

Muff got into position, and Dick placed the property wig upon his head, but it was fully fifteen minutes before Sheepshank strolled in. Muff began to get tired of waiting and began to wonder if he was not going to have his labor for his pains after all.

But he came at last, and Muff assumed the intelligent expression of the wooden head.

Dick and the others exchanged glances, but to Muff's disgust, who was not occupying a very easy position under the table, the conversation did not turn upon the right subject at all.

Dick arranged it, however, so that all four of them occupied chairs on the daylight-lighted stage only a little ways from where the anxious darkey was in position, and this prevented him from making the slightest movement, lest he should spoil the joke and turn the laugh on himself.

Nearly fifteen minutes elapsed, and yet not a word

"Practiced much?"

"Oh, got so I can hit a cent at two rods," replied Josh, thoughtlessly aiming at something out in the auditorium.

"Come off!" said Pratt.

"Draw it mhd, Josh. Make it a barn," said Dick.

"No, I'll be goldurned if I will."

"Make it a six inch bull's eye at two rods and I'll bet a dollar you can't hit it."

"Oh, you're only tryin' ter guy me."

"No, I'm not. But it takes a great deal of practice to hit so close as you are talking about."

"Why, I used up a whole box of cartridges yesterday."

"Now look here, Josh, I'll do better by you," said Dick, looking toward Muff.

"I don't care if you have shot away ten boxes of cartridges, that proves nothing."

"Oh, you be hanged," said Josh, who lately be-



"Now, then!" said Josh, "see me bore a hole in that ere nigger head," and he began to take aim. At this instant there was an unearthly yell of terror and the head, table and all, rose hurriedly up, and yelling: "Don't shoot!" fled behind the scenes.

by painting and fixing it up so that it looked almost exactly like Muff, and in this way it was used, whenever the piece was played.

How long this idea had been fermenting in Muff's thick head was not known, but he had frequently been seen laughing while looking at the painted block-head of himself, and he was probably trying to work it out at those times.

"Dick," he said one day, "if you help me, I juss' frighten de life out ob Josh."

"How?" asked Dick.

"Why, you know de property table dat we have to use in de farce? Well, dar, am a hole in de top ob dat table big enough to poke your head through, an' we hab to set de wig block to de one side so it won't fall through."

Dick walked across the stage and took a look at it.

"Well, yes; what of it?" he asked.

"I set dat table out here, an' when Josh he come, I pokes my head up through dat hole like it was de property block. De table cloth hide my body all right, an' you make Josh believe dat you can make dat head laugh an' talk. See?"

"Good snap, Muffy. Bring the table out and I will help you work it. But you had better hurry up for he will be here shortly," said Dick, as a smile stole over his handsome face.

Muff was delighted and went right to work.

They had no rehearsals, but as a general thing some of the men of the company were about the stage some portions of the day to see that everything was all right.

was said to Jack about making a blockhead laugh or talk. Indeed, it looked just as though Dick was turning the snap on him.

But it would never do to abandon it then, and with a sad sigh he rolled his eyes imploringly toward Dick, but he pretended not to see him, and the others laughed in spite of themselves.

"Wonder where that nigger is?" Josh finally asked.

"Gone up-town with the colonel, I believe," said Dick, carelessly.

"Now," thought Muff, "he is leading up to it."

But the subject dropped, and Dick began to whistle as though everything was lovely. Indeed, they all began to talk about Goldsboro, North Carolina, their next stand for three nights.

It did seem as though Muff would split with suppressed indignation. It was the last time he would ever work a racket with Dick Dingle.

Finally Josh pulled out a new revolver that he had lately purchased that day, and began looking at it.

"Hello, what have you got there—a gun?" asked Harry Pratt, curiously.

"Yes, b'gosh, an' I'm larnin' how to use it too, yer bet," replied Josh, earnestly.

"What for?" asked Dick.

"What for! Don't you fellers all carry revolvers. B'gosh, if I'd a had one when the varmints went through the train, you oet I'd never give up that boodle."

"Oh, you are going loaded after this, hey?"

"You bet."

gan to look upon everything Dick did as a guy or something of the kind.

"Talk is cheap, Josh, sugar sweetens. Now here is two dollars to nothing but wind that you can't sit where you are and hit that black head over there," said Dick, pointing to Muff, but he spoke it so low that the darkey did not hear.

"What! B'gosh, I'll cover that ten dollars," said he, covering the "two," and they all said "good enough."

"Now, then!" said Josh, "see me bore a hole in that ere nigger head," and he began to take aim.

At this instant there was an unearthly yell of terror and the head, table and all, rose hurriedly up, and yelling: "Don't shoot!" fled behind the scenes.

CHAPTER XX.

THE way that Africanus Muff vanished from that scene, from the aim of that revolver, was a caution to anybody in the way, going, table and all, hurriedly out of danger.

But if he was frightened, Josh Sheepshank was even more so.

Dropping his revolver, he yelled, "Oh, Lord!" made a rush, tripped over a stage brace, and went head first through the bass drum in the orchestra.

Pratt and Adams hastened to his relief, and while they were pulling him out of the drum, Dick replaced the table with the "property" wig block upon it, just where it had stood before.

Muff had incontinently skipped, and the probability was that he was still running.

Then Dick hastened to Josh's assistance, full of anxious looks and pertinent inquiries.

It required some effort to pull him out of that ruined drum, but they finally succeeded.

He wasn't hurt much, but otherwise he was the worst broken up man ever seen.

They assisted him upon the stage again, where he resumed his chair in a dazed sort of way.

"I say, Josh, what the blazes is the matter with you, anyway?" asked Dick.

"Why, that—that—" and he looked at the dummy head of Muff, that still stood on the table.

"That what?"

"Well, how about it, anyhow, b'gosh?" he finally asked, displaying some vigor.

"That is the conundrum we would all like to have answered, Josh. Have you been drinking?"

"No."

"Sleep well last night?"

"Yes."

"Any bad dreams?"

"No."

"That's queer. But I guess I'll take care of this gun," added Dick, picking up the revolver that the astonished countryman had dropped.

"Why?" he ventured to ask.

"Well, I think it's best. It's safer in my possession than in yours."

"But that—that—"

He pointed to the black wig block, and then after recoiling a moment, he recovered himself and walked slowly toward the table.

While the jokers were swapping winks.

He looked at it closely; felt of it; looked under the figured cambric cover that reached to the floor, after which he turned to the jokers, who had, in the meantime, become again very serious of action and visage.

"Well?" said Dick.

"Say, you, Dick."

"Yes."

"We made a bet, didn't we?" he asked, returning from the table to where the seemingly astonished jokers sat.

"Yes, but the bet is off, Josh. Here is your two dollars," said he, handing it to him.

"But I didn't try."

"Well, I should say you did not, unless what you call shooting is shooting yourself head first through the head of a drum."

"Bucking heads together," suggested Adams.

"But that wig block?" he asked pointing to it with a look of wild inquiry.

"Well, what of it? Is it off?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the same as you are."

"No!" he exclaimed.

"Well, that is what I should warble if I was stood up to sing."

"Why, I'm all right."

"Oh, you are, eh?"

"Of course, but—"

"Ah! yes, but."

"Yes, but," the other two said, seriously.

"Well, was it a trick?" asked Josh.

"It looked like a trick of the imagination. Now, Josh, take the advice of a friend. Don't drink so much."

"But, goldarn it, I don't drink at all," he said, vehemently.

"Oh, I mean on the sly," replied Guyer Dick.

"Go 'way with yer sahn? Yu-know I don't drink."

"I know you say so, but how are we to account for such performances as you have just given us, unless you drink or are off your base?"

Josh was silent.

"Guess you are not exactly right," suggested Pratt, with a solemn shake of his head.

"Well, I guess maybe I aren't. But tell me, now, an' no fulin, didn't none of yu see that table rise up an' git out?"

They all shook their heads and sizbed sadly.

"An' didn't hear that head—that is—didn't hear anybody say, 'Don't shute'?"

Again they all shook their heads as before.

He looked at them searchingly, but as they did not weaken he bowed his head in his hands and reflected, long enough to give the boys a chance to smile and wink again.

Then he looked up, and there was a sad look of inquiry on his face.

"Dick Dingle?"

"Yours truly," answered Dick.

"Dick, I guess I aren't well exactly," said he, with genuine solemnity.

"Well, I should say you are not."

"So say we all of us," said the other two.

"Better go and consult a doctor."

"By all means," chimed in the others.

"But let me give you a tip, Josh," said Dick, looking uncommonly knowing.

"Tip?"

"Yes. Min' I you, Josh, this is for your own good."

"My own good!" and he began to look frightened.

"Yes. Don't keep anything back when you state your case to the doctor."

"Don't keep anything back?" he exclaimed.

"No, go right to the front like a little man, and tell him everything."

"Yes, everything," said the others, soberly.

"Goldarn my buttons, I ain't got nothin' to tell," said he.

"Oh, that's all right?" said Pratt and Adams.

"Certainly not. You have got nothing to tell to us, but respect my tip, my dear Josh, and don't keep anything back from the doctor."

This puzzled him. What the blazes did they mean any way?

Then he walked over and took another look at the table and the wig block that had been painted to represent the head and face of Africanus Muff.

Everything seemed to be right, and perhaps, after all, he might be wrong.

Perhaps his digestion was out of order, but he couldn't understand it, for he had always had a stomach like an ostrich.

But there certainly must be something wrong when he imagined that he heard a wooden head speak, and saw it get up with the table on which it stood and rush away.

So he resolved to go and consult a doctor.

"Well, maybe something's wrong with my internals, so I guess I'll go and see a doctor."

"Great head!" said Pratt.

"But tell him everything, remember," said Dick most earnestly.

Josh made no reply, but he walked out of the stage and away, most seriously, giving the jokers a chance to laugh all they wanted to.

And that was a great deal.

It was a great snap; but where was Muff?

They waited for quite a while for him to show up, but he came not.

And yet it was just Josh's luck to meet that trembling coon before he had gone two blocks in the direction of the doctor's.

Muff would have avoided him, only Josh called him, and he crossed over to his side of the street.

"Where's the colonel?" he asked.

"Don't know, sah," replied Muff tremblingly.

"Well, if you see him, tell him I've gone to the doctors an'll be back soon."

"Yes, sah. Am you sick, sah?"

"Sick!" he exclaimed, and was on the point of passing along.

"What am de matter, sah?" asked Muff.

Josh stopped and looked at him.

Finally he remembered the episode, and in it this same coon was somewhat mixed.

This set Josh to thinking.

Muff was also thinking.

"Muff, will you own up?" Josh finally asked, looking hard at him.

"Yes, sah," for Muff thought Josh was on to him for sure.

"Well, what is it?" asked Josh, not fully himself, but not wishing to give himself away any further than he concluded, for some reason or other, that he had already done.

"It war all Dick's fault, sah."

"Dick's fault?"

"Yes, sah."

Sheepshank began to tumble to himself.

"What had he to do with it?" he asked, hardly knowing what else to ask.

"Well, I—ah, hab you got on to de snap yet?"

"Never mind. How do yu state it?"

Josh was up on the bit, because he suspected something but didn't want to give himself away.

"Well, sah, I—dat is, Dick and I—we wanted some fun, an' dar war a hole in de table, an' he say dat he make you believe dat he could make dat head talk an' laugh. Well, dat Dick, he got me in dar, put de wig on me an' keep me dar half an hour befo' you come. You know de rest," said he, with a sigh.

Josh reflected a moment, and concluded that he did know the rest.

Another snap by Dick Dingle, and he the victim, as usual!

That was the whole story. He saw it.

And yet, when he came to think of it, he was not certain but that Muff was quite as much of a victim as he was.

"All right, Muff, go on," said he.

"Am dat Dick at de theater?" asked Muff.

"Yes."—And Josh sauntered on, while Muff made his way back to the theater, where he was received with great laughter by the jokers.

"Dat am all right, Dick; but you jus' catch me in any other snap with you, dat's all," said he amid the laughter.

"Snap with me?"

"Yes."

"It was a snap of your own. What are you trying to diet me with?" demanded Dick.

"Yes, but you war gwine to help me out."

"Well, didn't I?"

"Great Moses!" exclaimed Muff. "I should think you did help me out. Help me in to it, more like," he added, sorrowfully.

And then he got laughed at some more.

"Oh, that's all right, Muff, old man. But you should see Josh."

"Did just see him."

"Where?"

"Gwine to de doctor's."

Another laugh.

Well, they tried to explain it to Muff that he didn't get it half so bad as his boss had, and that somewhat pacified him.

But Josh had really gone to the doctor!

For an unexpected snap, it was one of the best ones that had ever been worked.

And they laughed and spread the story during the remainder of the day.

But Josh went to no doctor after he had met Muff and found out the secret of the matter.

Oh, no! he wouldn't put his foot in it any deeper than it now was.

No; he went back to his hotel, and after taking his grand tumble, he took a nap.

"That's all right, Dick," he said that night, after they were dressed for their parts.

"Oh, what did the doctor say Josh?" asked Dick bobbing up serenely.

"Doctor? What did he say? He gave me some salt," replied Josh, half severely.

"Is salt good for the nerves?"

"I guess so. He said it was what my nerves wanted, at all events."

"Did you tell him all?"

"Yes; and he said my nerves war too fresh and wanted saltin'."

Dick laughed in spite of himself.

"That's all right, Dick; only the same thing won't work agin, now that my nerves is salted."

"Good boy!"

"Dick, I war agoin to kill yu, but I guess I won't this time, only don't do it agin," said Josh, walking away.

And so ended another snap which tended to lighten the monotony of life on the road, but it was many a day before the laugh died.

Their next stand was at Greensboro, N. C., and it was a long journey there.

There was no business there and they dropped some money, having failed to pick up enough to meet expenses, and from there they went to the capital of the state, beautiful Raleigh.

Here they were advertised to play for a week, which was something of a relief after a long run of one and two night stands.

Business proved quite good here, the Legislature being in session at the time.

Nothing of importance occurred to any member of the combination, but I cannot forbear relating a funny event that happened there on this occasion.

Colonel Suckerbait being one of the characters, which makes it rightfully become a part of our whole story.

An Irishman, fresh from the old sod, by some means or other found himself in Raleigh, dead broke, a stranger in a strange land.

He tried hard to find work, but the negroes monopolized it all. Finally, he applied to the landlord of the principal hotel there for work of some sort, he hardly cared what it was.

The landlord didn't want him, having all the help he needed, but he felt sorry for poor Pat, and so told him to consider himself on trial for a few days at all events, for he just then happened to think of something he could put him at later on.

He had just put a new carpet on the reading-room floor, together with half a dozen cuspidors, having been greatly annoyed hitherto by the ill-breeding and tobacco-juice-squirting proclivities of his patrons.

And for fear they would not take the hint, he put up a sign which read: "Gentlemen will please use the spittoons."

So said the landlord to Pat, taking him into this newly-furnished reading-room, after he had laid aside his hat and was ready for business:

"You see, Pat, that I have a new carpet on this room; and do you see that sign up there?"

"I do, sor."

"Well, I want you for the present to remain in this room, and if you see anybody neglecting to obey that injunction, report them to me."

"I will, sor," replied Pat, and the landlord left him alone.

It so happened that there was no one in the reading-room at the time, and Pat was waiting for his first customer, when Suckerbait entered the room and took a seat at the table for the purpose of writing some letters.

Now the colonel did not use tobacco in any form, and consequently did not have that use for a cuspidor that smokers or chewers do.

He plunged right into the business that he had in hand, taking no notice of whether he was alone or in company.

Pat was watching him narrowly, at the same time concluding that the man, whoever he might be, was violating one of the rules of the reading-room.

So, after enduring this disrespect for some time, Pat approached him, and tapping him on the shoulder, asked:

"Der yer moind that soign beyant?" he asked, pointing to the sign that he thought was being violated.

"Well, yes. What of it?" asked Suckerbait, glancing first at Pat, then at the sign, and then resuming his writing.

"Just moind it, if yer please, sor."

Suckerbait paid no attention to him, but kept right on with his work.

This was a trifle too much for Pat. He looked at him for a moment to make sure whether the man intended to obey the printed injunction or not, and seeing him still utterly indifferent, he took up one of the cuspidors and placed it close to him.

"Der yer moind that?" he demanded.

"Well, what of it? Who are you?"

"I'm a porter, sir. Der yer moind ther soign?"

"Yes."

"An' ther spittoon?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"Ther soign says that gentlemen will plaze use ther spittoon, an' I'm put here ter enforce the order."

"What in thunder are you driving at?" demanded Suckerbait, who by this time was beginning to get annoyed.

"Use ther spittoon, or, begob, I'll report yees ter ther boss—so I will!" said he, striking the table with his fist.

Colonel Suckerbait looked at him a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"Begorra, I'll report yees, anyhow," said Pat, rushing from the room.

"Well, I like this!" muttered the colonel. "The fellow will have me use the spittoon whether I wish to or not. Guess he must be crazy," and he resumed his writing again.

Scarcely had he done so, however, when Pat returned, in company with the landlord.

"That's him, sor. I put ther spittoon roight down there forninst him an' tould him ter use it, as ther soign bids him, but he wudn't."

"Colonel, I—I beg pardon—" began the landlord.

"For what, pray?"

"My porter is perfectly right in seeing that guests use the cuspidors, and I—"

"Well, what in thunder do I want to use it for?—I neither smoke nor chew," roared Suckerbait.

"Indeed?"

"Certainly not, and this fellow insists that I shall make use of the spittoon."

The landlord looked at Pat.

"Did yees not bid me, sor, to report yees ony man

onilled, and in his uncertainty he went to Dick Dingle as usual for advice.

"Josh, I have it," said Dick, placing his forefinger alongside his nose and looking very wise.

"What?" asked Josh, with nervous anxiety.

"I know how to fix her. Love should never be all on one side. You are dead gone on her and she knows it. Now it is her disposition to play off under such circumstances. She likes you, but womanlike, she wants to tease you. Now take a fall out of yourself."

"How, Dick?"

"Make her jealous of you."

"Good gracious!"

"Pay great attention to Miss Kutejack for a while and I'll bet you will set her crazy."

"B'gosh, I'll do it!" exclaimed Josh.

hundred dollars he still had in his possession, knowing very well that his "second attraction," the charming and vivacious soubrette, "Becky" Kutejack, did not and could not have that influence over him that Angella Vandevere possessed.

Otherwise it was fun for all hands, but being only what they might naturally expect from Dick Dingle, the prince of practical jokers.

And Josh!

He was playing his hand for all it was worth.

The more he thought of it, the more he liked the plot to break Miss Vandevere all up. She was undoubtedly a terrible coquette, and the only thing to bring her to her senses was to almost break her heart by making love to another.

And "Becky" also played her hand for all it would count up for.



Pratt and Adams hastened to his relief, and while they were pulling him out of the drum, Dick replaced the table with the "property" wig block upon it, just where it had stood before.

that didn't use ther spittoons, as ther soign reads?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I did. But if a man is neither chewing, smoking, or spitting, there is no occasion for his using a spittoon."

Pat scratched his head and tumbled, while Suckerbait and the landlord laughed heartily over his mistake.

"Faix, I thought I war doin' me duty, sor," said he, as they ceased laughing.

"You overdid it, Pat. Never call a guest's attention to what he has no occasion to use. Come out into the office and I will find something else for you to do," said the landlord, laughing and leading Pat away.

The story got out, and Pat as the hero of it, occasioned many a laugh afterward, for in truth, he was very much of a Handy Andy.

Well, the week at Raleigh proved a good one. Salaries were paid and everything was lovely.

Even Josh forgot his sorrow, although he was making no headway with Miss Vandevere, the stellar attraction of the combination and the star of his heart as well.

No, he would make no further progress unless they again struck bad luck and that five hundred dollars must be had to save them from being stranded.

But Josh of course never tumbled to that part of it. He simply thought that Dunellen was her favorite just then, and that the day was slightly colder for him than it had formerly been.

And yet this didn't make him a bit happy or rec-

CHAPTER XXI.

Of course Dick Dingle told both Miss Vandevere and Miss Kutejack of the advice he had given Josh Sheepshank, and of his resolution to make desperate love to the one in the hopes of making the other jealous, and in that way catching her.

The two young actresses laughed heartily over Dick's plan in connection with it, and agreed to follow his instructions.

Their next stand was in Peterboro, Va., and from there they were to go to Richmond for a week, with great expectations.

And Josh just went in for wringing the heart of Angella Vandevere. He took every occasion to show attention to Miss Kutejack, greatly to the delight of that vivacious young artist, since it insured her lots of treats and more attention than she had received since they had been out.

Now, Josh really did not care much for her, and she knew it, for ever since they had set out from New York he had had eyes for no one but Miss Vandevere, and she got all his treats, all his presents.

This was, indeed, a bright piece of business on the part of Dick Dingle, for it not only brought fun and attention upon "Becky" Kutejack, but it opened a first-class way for Miss Vandevere to have done with him, and at the same time afforded much amusement to the company, Dick having given them all the straight tip in the snap.

They all liked it but Colonel Suckerbait. He was afraid that something would happen whereby Miss Vandevere would lose her grip on Josh and the five

True, Josh did not make very rapturous love to her save when Angella was looking on, for he cared but little for "Becky," only using her for an instrument to almost kill his coquetting mash.

But "Becky" took the lead. She had no idea of performing on the second fiddle.

Josh did not make love to her except when it suited him, but she insisted upon making love to him.

This took him somewhat aback, for he could scarcely understand it.

And every time when Angella was near, and he pretended to be so fond of his new flame, and the old one looked sad and hurt, "Becky" took advantage of it something after this style:

"Oh, Joshua, do you then love me so dearly?"

Josh would start a little, but seeing Angella near and probably within hearing, he would say:

"Why, Becky, you know I do, b'gosh! I think you're the alfredist nicest girl on earth."

"But you are not trifling with me, Josh?"

"Triffin!" he exclaims.

"Yes; you men are so unreliable; you say you love me; but will you marry me?"

Josh catches his breath and looks around.

The girl, whose coquetry and trifling he wishes to crush, doesn't appear to be wholly broken up, yet, and so he answers:

"Of course I will."

"Do you swear it?"

"Of course I do."

"And that you love me better than anybody in the world."

Josh glances at Angie again, but she has turned her back upon them.

He resolves to give the final thrust.

"Yes, b'gosh!"

"Ah! then I accept your love, and will consider myself engaged to you," replies "Becky," loud enough for all those standing around to hear.

He wished she had not spoken quite so loud; but after all, if she had not, Angie would not have heard, and the arrow would not have rankled in her heart.

He glanced from one to the other.

Did "Becky" understand it, or was she taking it all in downright earnest?

"That's all right," said he, finally.

"Wretch!" exclaims Miss Vandevere, and rushes most melodramatically from their presence.

Josh says to himself—"She's hit at last!" and then contentedly continues making love to Becky.

And so the thing kept on, yet Angie didn't seem crushed worth a cent.

"Well, Josh, when is the thing going to be played?" asked Harry Pratt of him one day not long after all hands had heard him engage himself.

"What thing?" asked Josh, in surprise.

"Why, the little marrying snap, to be sure, Josh. I congratulate you. I do, by gracious, for "Becky" is one of the sweetest and most talented girls in the profession," said Harry, earnestly.

"Wal, yes, she's nice 'nough sort of a girl," said Josh, musingly.

"Nice enough sort of a girl! Well, that is rather an equivocal and ambiguous way of speaking of one's future wife I must say," said Harry, starting and glaring at him.

"Future what?" asked Josh.

"Why, wife, to be sure."

"Wal, by thunder!" exclaimed Josh.

"About what?"

"B'gosh, I didn't think you was so green."

"Green! Why sayest thou so? From whence come those emerald tinges upon me? Speak, let me not burst in ignorance!" exclaimed Harry, with a very fine imitation of Edwin Booth in *Hamlet*.

"What in thunder be you givin' me?"

"A question that demands an answer, sir!" said he, even more tragically.

"Oh, you be goldarned."

"No, sir, never! I positively refuse to be goldarned. There is no law by which you can compel me to be goldarned. I speak thus earnestly because Miss Kutejack is my friend, and because you speak lightly of her while betrothed to her."

"What!" exclaimed Josh.

"You do not deny it, I hope?"

"What?"

"That you are engaged to be married to her."

"Why, goldarn you're picter, there's where the fun comes in," said Josh, grinning.

"Fun! What fun?"

"Why, it was all in fun."

"Fun! Fun to engage yourself to marry a trusting, honorable girl, whose love you have won? I fail to catch your meaning."

"Wal, it wur all a put up job between Dick Dingle an' I."

"What, to injure an innocent, trusting girl? I don't believe it. As her friend, as a friend to all unprotected innocence, I ask you, sir, do you intend to marry Miss Kutejack, as you have agreed to do, and as we all heard you agree?" asked Harry, becoming actually tragic.

Josh was startled.

"Oh, pshaw! She don't care anything about me," he said, not knowing what else to say.

"You have won her young heart, sir."

"Oh, that's all right, Harry."

"No, sir, it is not all right, nor will it be, until you fulfill your promise to that poor girl."

"Oh, pshaw!"

"No, sir. Remember I am her friend and champion, and if you trifle with her trusting young heart, I'll call you out, sir."

"Call me out? What for?"

"To fight, sir; to fight. We are in a state now where duelling is permitted, and so be very guarded in what you do," and, tapping the location of his heart, significantly, Harry strode away in a most tragic way, leaving poor Josh looking after him with mouth and eyes wide open.

"Wal, I'll be goldarned to goldarnation!" he finally exclaimed. "Ther darned critter's mad's a wet hen, unless he's a natural crank, an' its just croppin' out. Guess he's sorter gone on 'Becky' nimsel, if the truth were only known. Goin' to call me out, hey?" and then he reflected.

"Oh, he's too fresh," he finally muttered, "an' he don't know the snap games Dick'n I do, or he'd take water. Wonder if Becky really is in love with me? If she is, it's goin' to mix things up like thunder! I allus war a sort of a cuss 'mong the gals ever since I can remember," he reflected, proudly. "There was Dolly Dimple, a goldarned nice girl, if she only had any style 'bout her; she was dead gone on me afore I was fifteen years old, an' no end of gals that I used to meet at singin' skules an' huskin' bees, that was all arter me."

Then he chuckled proudly to himself.

"But," he afterwards adds, "Angie Vandevere is ther only gal I ever loved, and this'll wake her up. Why, she was as mad as a yeller wasp when she heard me makin' love to Becky. So Dick was right 'bout it. Dick's a goldarned smart feller, b'gosh, an' I'll folter his bossin' if Harry Pratt does get mad an' kick."

And so the snap went on, all hands taking a hand in it with much earnestness.

Finally, Angie Vandevere contrived to draw him out just as she wanted to, complicating matters even

more than ever, and working Josh into a "box" that he had not dreamed of.

He was all the while fondly believing that he was breaking her heart, for she acted like it whenever he was around, and after he thought he had tormented her sufficiently, he began to edge around her a little, just to give her a chance to look awfully sorry for treating him as she had done.

"Don't speak to me, sir!" said she, starting from his approaches with a tragic air. "How dare you!"

"What's ther matter, Angie?" he asked, smiling.

"Matter, sir! Did I not overhear your perfidy?"

"My what?"

The word was a stranger to him.

"Did I not hear you make love to Miss Kutejack and promise to marry her, even after all the love you had made to me? Begone, sir! I, know you for a false and perjured villain!"

"Oh! pshaw, Angie! don't get mad," said he.

"Mad? What do you take me for?" she demanded angrily.

"Why, a durned nice gal of course."

"You must indeed, when you desert me for another in such a cruel manner," said the actress, with comical bitterness.

"Oh, pshaw! Yu don't care nothing 'bout me."

"No, not now. But—be still my heart!—before I found you out, oh! how fondly—Well, I will say no more. Begone, false one! Go to the new love you have found, but do not deceive her so basely as you have me."

Angie was doing some first class comedy acting, and the other members of the company were listening, although out of sight.

"Angie, don't be a fule," he plead.

"I shall be one no longer at all events, so far as you are concerned, be assured of that, sir."

"Oh, pshaw! It was only in fun, Angie."

"Fun! What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Why, that racket with Becky."

"Racket, sir?"

"Yes, I was only in fun."

"With her?"

"That's all. If yu'd be good to me I wouldn't have any other gal in creation," said he, fondly.

"What's that you say; that you had no notion of marrying her when you promised to?"

"Why, in course not," and he laughed heartily.

"Villain! Wretch!" exclaimed Becky Kutejack, darting suddenly from behind a wing and confronting him, with double distilled tragedy.

Josh jumped and almost left his hat in the air.

"Ignoble wretch!" she cried again.

Josh looked foolishly wild, glancing from one to the other of his indignant victims.

"Wal, what's ther matter?" he finally asked.

"Wretch, never speak to me again!"

"All right," replied Josh, laughing and blushing.

"But I will be even with you, Sir Knave. Remember, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!' and she walked majestically away.

"Sho! Yu don't say so!" he called after her, and then he turned to Angie.

"Don't speak to me, sir! I know you for a false, deceiving wretch!" and she also walked away, with the air of an injured woman, well acted.

Josh's eyes seemed trying to get out of his head to follow her.

Finally he puckered his lips and gave a low whistle in evident astonishment.

"Wal, b'gosh, guess I've landed on the floor in tryin' to set on two stools to once," he muttered.

And just then Dick Dingle, to all appearances, happened upon the scene.

"Hello, Josh! How's things?" he asked, briskly.

"Wal, Dick, things is sorter mixed, b'gosh."

"How so?"

And Josh told him the whole business, which was, however, as well known to him as it is to the reader.

"Oh, well, she'll weaken," mused Dick.

"Who'll weaken?" Josh asked, anxiously.

"Why, Angie."

"Du yu think so, Dick?"

"Cert. She's only mad. She'll get over that. But the snap worked nicely, didn't it?"

"Wal—yes, if she only weakens," he mused.

"Oh, she will. My word on it, Josh. Of course she won't do it, or, at least, show it right away, but I can see that she was badly cut up at your making love to Becky."

"Didn't I do it nice?"

"Well, no, Josh, I'm sorry to say I think you rather overdid the matter."

"How so?"

"You hadn't ought to have promised to marry her," said he. And Josh was silent.

"You could have worked it just as well, and even better, without going so far."

"Why so?"

"Well, Becky took it in dead earnest, I think."

"I should say she did, b'gosh; she pitched into me the wust way just now."

"Oh, she'll get over that all right."

"Wal, I hope so, for now it looks as though I'd hit the floor atween two stools," he mused.

"Oh, that's all right. All you have to do is to keep cool and wait," said Dick, and then he sauntered carelessly away, as did Josh.

The next day they reached Richmond, where they were well billed for a week's stand, and the first night was a "hummer." That is to say, they had a big house and everything was lovely.

Josh was feeling like a new silk hat.

For a little while everything was quiet between him and the two principal ladies of the company. They had ignored him, it was true, but he thought only of his final triumph.

Meanwhile Dick Dingle was there.

Dick was always "there" when there was a show for fun.

The morning after the first night's performance in Richmond, where Dick, by the bye, had made a great hit in his character of the stage-struck barber, Josh was just preparing to go down to breakfast, when a hall-boy of the hotel handed him a letter.

There was nothing unusual in that, but there was something unusual in his expression when he read the contents, which were as follows:

"SIR: I am unknown to you, but I am a cousin of Miss Kutejack, and as you have basely injured her, I naturally seek satisfaction, such as is vouchsafed by one gentleman to another, on her account. Be good enough to name a friend who will arrange with a friend of mine for a meeting."

"JAMES KUTEJACK."

"What in thunder does he mean?" thought Josh, and, as usual, he took it to Dick Dingle.

"Why, it's a challenge for a duel," said Dick, after reading it carefully.

"Thunderin' Moses! A duel?"

"Yes, straight and square."

"But it's agin the law," said Josh, turning pale.

"Not in Virginia. So she has a cousin here, eh?" he added, musingly.

"Ther darned hussy! She went an' told him all about it, hey?"

"It would seem so. I told you that you went too far in agreeing to marry her. Sorry."

"Great Jewhithers!" and he hove a heaving sigh.

"But of course you'll accept it?"

"What!" and Josh's eyes seemed about leaping out of his head.

"Of course you won't weaken and show the white feather?" said Dick, earnestly.

"An' fight him?"

"Certainly. You have got yourself into the scrape and if you don't fight your way out, Angie will never look at you again. Fight, and my word for it, she will marry you the next day."

"But I might git—git—"

"Nonsense. This is the land of chivalry. Here a coward, or a man who refuses to fight, especially where the good name of a lady is concerned, is looked upon as even lower than a cur or a dunghill rooster."

"Wal, I'd rather be a live dunghill than a dead gamecock any day," said Josh.

"But, Angie. She will hate you if you refuse to fight, and you will be advertised in the papers as a coward."

"Everlastin' Moses!" he ejaculated.

"Fact, I assure you. Now let me manage this thing for you," said Dick, assuringly.

"Manage what—my funeral?"

"No, your bursting forth as a man of honor; one to catch the very heart of Angie Vandevere."

Josh choked for a moment without speaking.

"Wal, don't you think you can manage to get me out of it without fightin'?" he asked, anxiously.

"I hardly think so, with honor. But let me work it. Brace right up, and ten to one we will bluff him right out of it, and you will come off with flying colors, without burning powder."

"Good, b'gosh! Go it, Dick! Go heavy on the bluff," said he, and Dick, while commending his nerve, wrote an acceptance of the challenge and bore it away in triumph, leaving Josh to his breakfast and his thoughts.

And such thoughts as they were! Never in his life had he been placed in such a position. He had often read about duels, but this was his first experience in one.

It was a terrible situation, but he had undoubtedly gotten himself into the scrape, and as Dick had said, he must now either fight or be posted as a coward, and irrevocably lose Angella Vandevere. But he hoped that Dick would in some way avoid it, or that Mr. Kutejack would be bluffed out of the meeting entirely.

But how funny things had worked! On his attempt to make Miss Vandevere jealous and sick, he had, as usual, got into a worse scrape.

Hadn't he better write home to his folks, so that they might send for his body in case he got killed.

Wasn't there any way of preventing it? How would it end, anyway?

Still he believed that his prompt acceptance of the challenge would bluff this champion, as Dick had suggested; but having accepted it and sent his second, he had waded in so far that retreating were as dangerous as to go o'er, as *Macbeth* says.

Meantime, Dick was at work upon the snap he had been engaged upon, and every member of the company knew all about it. Indeed, they were all calculating to witness that duel, that is, if Josh could be brought to the scratch.

Josh went from the dining-room into the public parlor, where he met Colonel Suckerbait.

"Hello, Josh. What's all this trouble you are making with Angie and Becky?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing; only a little fun," said Josh.

"Fun! Well, your fun is liable to break up the combination, just as we have begun to make money."

"Oh, pshaw! It's much ado about nothin'. Why, du you know, Becky's cousin has sent me a challenge to fight him a duel."

"Nonsense!"

"Fact."

"Which you declined, of course?"

"Not much. I've accepted it, and Dick has gone to fix things," said he, with a swagger.

"Great heavens! You will ruin us. Why can't you remain quiet, as I do?" asked the colonel.

"Wal, b'gosh, he challenged me, an' I'll be goldarned if I'm goin' to let him bluff me. I'll fight him

with anything from a cannon to a fishhook," and he pounded one of the tables with his clinched fist. Dick just then entered the room, beaming. "Wal, how is it?" asked Josh, a trifle subdued. "Elegant!" exclaimed Dick, seizing his hand. "Good!" said Josh, the colonel being amazed. "Got everything fixed just as we want it." "What have you been doing, Dick?" asked Suckerbait. "Fixing things for Josh. He weakened." "Weakened!" exclaimed Josh, eagerly. "Yes, after objecting to our choice of weapons." "How?" asked Josh, faintly. "Oh, he wanted broadswords; but I insisted, as the challenged party, on pistols at eight paces, and he finally gave in. So it's all arranged for this afternoon, Josh; pistols at eight paces. Congratulate me!"

Josh groaned. "But if you only brace up and put on a bold front, I think he will weaken and give you the call." "I—I don't want any call. If he weakens, why not call the thing off? There's no use of fightin' anyhow," said he, beseechingly. "But he insists upon it, and the arrangements are all made; pistols at eight paces, just outside of the city limits, this afternoon," said Dick, decidedly. "But you just insisted upon it that you were anxious to fight," said Col. Suckerbait. "Of course he is," said Dick; "Josh is game to the backbone." "Wal, but—" "What?" "Won't he excuse me?" he asked, timidly. "Why, of course not. These fiery Virginians are

"Gosh, I don't kinder like tu," he mused. "Well, I'll go along with you; come on," he said, starting for the door. Josh followed with downcast face and silently. They at once went to Miss Kutejack's parlor. But of course she knew all about the snap and was ready for another scene of her part. She stared in a stagy fashion at Josh as he entered the room accompanied by Dick, who came to the front. "Becky, we are in an awful fix," began Dick. "We? Who?" she asked. "Why, Josh, here," said Dick, pointing to Josh. "Serves him just right," she said, and Josh hung his face in confusion. "Your cousin has challenged him," said Dick. "I am glad of it."



"Villain! Wretch!" exclaimed Becky Kutejack, darting suddenly from behind a wing and confronting him, with double distilled tragedy.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" moaned Josh, and throwing his hat upon the floor, he dove upon a sofa, face downward, bellowing like a frightened calf.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE situation was an unusual one, but withal so ludicrous that Dick Dingle and Colonel Suckerbait could scarcely keep from laughing.

There lay Josh Sheepshank on the sofa, with his face buried in the upholstery, mourning and giving way to the sorrow of his heart.

He had hoped and calculated upon bluffing that Mr. Kutejack, who had sent him a challenge because of the way he had treated Miss Becky, his cousin, as he signed himself, but the rascal had actually accepted it!

They didn't molest him for a moment, but Dick finally approached him and pulled him from the sofa. "What in thunder is the matter with you?" he demanded, with all the severity he could muster.

Josh picked himself up, glanced around the room at Dick and the colonel, and then sat down. "What's the matter?" asked the colonel.

But he made no answer.

"Why, just a moment ago you said you were ready to fight him with anything, from a cannon to a fishhook. What's the matter?"

"Are you weakening?" asked Dick.

"Weakenin' no; only—you said you'd go an' bluff him out of it," said he, at length.

"I said I'd try to bluff him out of it, but he don't bluff as yet worth a cent."

not used to excusing people after they have accepted their challenge.

"Couldn't you fix it in no other way, Dick?"

"No, and it's all fixed."

"Yes, and maybe I shall be," he simpered.

"Nonsense! Brace right up, and your chances are just as good as his are."

"Wal, but goldarn my sister's cat's tail, that's what's ther matter. Can't you see?"

"Yes, we see," and they laughed.

"Say, Dick; wonder what he'll take and not fight?"

he asked, after a moment's deliberation.

"Oh, he can't be bought off. I'm sure of that."

Josh was silent.

"Confound that fool of a Dick," mused Suckerbait.

"If he'd been half smart, he'd have offered to hush the matter up for five hundred dollars, which Josh would have paid in an instant, and he might have handed it over to me. Dick never was much of a financier," and he was mad.

"Well," said Dick, after a moment's reflection, "perhaps he might say no more about it if you would only marry Becky."

"Do you really think so, Dick?" he asked, eagerly.

"Perhaps he might."

"Wal, I don't feel like fightin' to-day. Go an' tell him that I'll marry her," said he, dead in earnest.

"But hadn't you better find out first whether or not she will marry you?"

This broke him all up again.

Ten to one she would refuse him after all that had happened. Then what was to be done?

"Go and see her about it."

"Yes, but that isn't the worst of it; Josh has accepted it and everything is settled."

"Well, I hope he will stick to his engagement better than he did with me. But what is the trouble with you? Are you afraid my cousin will back out?" she asked, with a sneer.

"Oh, no. We are only afraid he won't. Josh accepted the challenge expecting that promptness and a little bluff would make him weaken. But he doesn't weaken, and Josh feels so bad about it, because he hates to shed your relation's blood, I suppose, that he has concluded to make good his promise to you in hopes that the matter will be dropped."

"Yes, b'gosh, that's it, clip an' clean," said Josh, speaking for the first time.

Becky started and glared at him.

Josh felt his knees shake.

"Sir, dare you come to me with such a cowardly proposal?" she said, fiercely. "Ask me to marry you after what has happened?"

"Wal, I'll make it all right, Becky," said he.

"No, sir. You cannot make it all right, and I would not marry you now if you would give me the wealth of the Indies. Be good enough to leave my room, sir, and never speak to me again."

Josh looked appealingly at Dick.

"Does that settle it, Becky?" Dick asked.

"Most assuredly it does, and I am surprised at you, Dick, for bringing him here at all, knowing what meanness he practiced upon me."

"Well, then there remains no alternative but to fight," said Dick, sadly.

"Oh, Becky, I do love you!" pleaded Josh.

"Silence, sir!"

"Du yn mean it?" he asked, suddenly.

"I do, indeed. 'Begone!' said she, pointing to the door, angrily.

"Then that settles it, b'gosh," said he, slapping his hands together vehemently.

"I am glad it does."

"I'll shute that are goldarned cousin of yourn, sure's cheese is cheese. I'll pink him right through the gizzard, b'gosh, an' yu'll have to answer for it, by thunder," said he, starting from the room in tragic mode.

Dick laughed with Becky, then followed him.

"Good boy," said he, slapping him on the back.

"That's the sort of nerve to have. I knew you had it if it could only be worked up."

"Goldarn my sister's cat's hind leg, if I don't pink him now, sure's guns," said Josh.

Becky or never got his spunk up if she had not given him such an uncompromising shake.

And it was arranged that the members of the combination should be witnesses to the duel, but out of sight in the shrubbery.

Just before arriving on the selected spot, Dick gave Josh a "clove," which steadied his nerves quite considerably.

"Goldarn my butes," he would mutter now and then. "I'll show that sassy Becky Kutejack that I'm no mush-and-milk sucker."

"Why of course you will, and ten to one her fire-eating cousin don't weaken," replies Dick.

"I don't care a goldarned dried apple whether he does or not. I'm arter blood."

"And you shall have it, my friend."

On arriving at the appointed place, they found the indignant cousin and his second in waiting.

word "Two," you are to take aim. At the word "Three," you are to fire, and may justice be vindicated," he added, impressively.

Josh sighed again, and wished he had never left the Vermont homestead.

He wondered how the other fellow felt.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" called Dick, stepping back a few paces.

"Yes," came from the other second.

"All ready, Josh?" he asked, in a lower tone.

"Yea, goldarn it; let her go!" he growled, and Dick saw that he was really dead in earnest, and those who were secretly watching, expecting to see him bellow and weaken, looked at each other in astonishment.

Josh had nerve after all.

"Now, then, gentlemen, observe!" and Dick looked critically from one to the other.



"Are you hurt, Josh?" he asked, tenderly. Josh turned over and looked at himself. "Am I hurt? Oh, Lord, see how I bleed!" he moaned. "Where is it—send for no, take me to a doctor, and have me sewed up if thar's any chance of my livin'," he said sadly.

"Certainly. The idea of her bullying you the way she did. She thinks you are a coward, but we shall soon show her whether you are or not, and at the same time it will win Angie, sure."

"I aren't afraid of thunder and lightning now."

"Of course you are not."

"Her blood of ther Sheepshank's is red hot when it is up, yu bet."

"Oh, I believe it."

"My forefathers were all good fighters when they got their blood riled, an' mine's riled now."

"Good. The pistols are all ready, and we will at once prepare for the field of glory," said Dick, taking his arm.

It was a part of Dick's business to keep his blood "riled" until they reached the field agreed upon for the duel, about a mile outside the city proper.

There could be no mistake about it; Josh was riled, as he called it. Indeed, he not only saw that he must fight, because he accepted the challenge, and would be regarded as a cur by everybody if he backed out, but Angie would undoubtedly give him the cold, dead snake unless he did go to the front, and Becky Kutejack had taken the right method of rousing his "dander," on account of which he was bound to fight anyhow.

Indeed, Dick Dingle, Angela Vandevere, and Becky Kutejack had played their parts so well that they had really worked out a realistic drama from a farce.

But it was all tragedy and no farce to Joshua Sheepshank now. He had been frightened nearly out of his wits at first, and probably would have married

But even this did not make Josh weaken, although perhaps it might had it not been for that "clove." They are great nerve steadiers.

Dick and the other second conferred for awhile, and then paced off the ground—eight paces—while the members of the company looked on out of their ambush with suppressed laughter.

Dick returned to Josh, holding two enormous horse pistols—one in either hand.

"I have won the choice of ground for you, Josh, and also the privilege of giving the word."

"All right. I am glad they are big pistols, for I want to bore a hole in him big enough to drive a three-year-old steer through," said he, glancing at the weapons.

"That's all right. Brace right up, for I think your antagonist is beginning to feel sick. Come, now, and take your place."

"Let her go," replied Josh, following him. "But you'll be sure and write to my folks if I git knocked out, won't you Dick?" he added, with a touch of sadness.

"Certainly, but don't fret about that now. Brace right up."

Josh went down into his boots for a sigh.

But he followed his second to the place assigned him, as did the fiery Kutejack, who, by the bye, was no other than Dunellen disguised.

Both were placed back to back, eight paces apart, and Dick gave each a pistol.

"Gentlemen, your seconds have agreed that you are to stand back to back, eight paces apart. At the word 'One,' you are to turn and face each other. At the

Josh was fingering the trigger of his big pistol with undisguised nervousness, and Dick began to fear that he would weaken if the thing wasn't hurried up.

"One!" he cried.

Both men turned and faced each other, and it required nerve to do it at that short distance and with such formidable weapons.

"Two!" said Dick, calmly, and both men cocked their pistols and took aim.

Dick glanced anxiously at Josh, but his wild eye was fixed on the sights of his weapon.

"Nerve all right," thought he.

"Three!" he finally shouted.

But by this time Josh's nervous force had exploded. And yet both weapons exploded at the same instant or so nearly so that they made but one report at all events.

Josh was hit in the head with something, and this put a finish to the nerve that had held him up so long. He felt that he had received a death wound, although all that had struck him was a little bladder ball or capsule containing liquid red or "stage blood," which splattered all over him, beside giving him a terrible shock; and so he fell half fainting, more frightened than hurt.

As he did so, his antagonist and second started on a run from the scene.

"Come back here, you cowardly villains!" cried Dick. "You have killed my principal, and now you must fight me!"

But they continued to skip, and heeded not.

Dick bent over his "bleeding" friend.

"Are you hurt, Josh?" he asked, tenderly.

Josh turned over and looked at himself.

"Am I hurt? Oh, Lord, see how I bleed!" he moaned. "Where is it—send for—no, take me to a doctor, and have me sewed up if there's any chance of my livin'," he said, sadly.

"I—I see blood, but I see no wound," replied Dick, looking him over.

"You don't! What's the cuss that shot me?" he demanded, looking around.

"They have ignominiously fled. Like arrant cowards, they have skipped the gutter, knowing that I myself would demand another shot."

"Goldarn his plecter! Du you think I'll die?"

"Let me see," and he looked him over again, while those in hiding were nearly bursting at the comical business he was putting in.

Indeed, many of them could not stand it any longer without shouting, and so stole away to a remote spot where they could safely do so.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Josh.

"But I don't see where you are hit," said Dick.

"But I must be. I felt it. An' look at the blood," he said, seriously.

"Felt it! Where?"

"Right on my forehead."

Dick looked again.

"I see no bullet hole," he said.

"But the blood. Look! It's spattered all over my shirt," replied Josh.

Indeed, that was even so, for the bladder had struck as squarely as a bullet might have done, and bespattered his face and shirt-front with the semblance of blood.

"But where is the wound?"

"Goldarned if I know. Mighty curious," he replied, going over himself, thoughtfully.

It was all Dick could do to keep from laughing.

"Do you feel it?"

"No, I don't feel anything," he mused.

"Then I guess you were not hit."

"But how 'bout this blood? Look at it."

"It puzzles me. I can't understand it," said Dick, standing back and looking at him.

Then Josh went over himself again in search of a bullet hole, but he couldn't find one.

He wiped the blood from his face and looked at it attentively, but he couldn't make it out.

Finally he looked at Dick and asked:

"Du you think I hit him?"

"Well, by the way he skipped from the ensanguined field, I should judge that you did not," said Dick.

"Fact is, I ain't used to them big pistols," he said, looking at the one on the ground.

"And are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Don't seem to me that I be, but how about this blood?" he added.

"I give it up. But, come; let us return and find a place for you to wash your face," said Dick, taking up the pistol and starting to leave.

Josh followed, and finding that his walking apparatus was all right, he took heart, becoming almost as bold as ever.

"Wish I could get another shot at the cuss," he muttered, as they walked along.

"I intended to have one myself, but the way he got up and dusted after the first fire, was a caution."

And so they talked the matter over until they got back to Richmond.

Meantime, Dunellen and the other members of the combination had gone ahead of them and had already reached their hotel, laughing all the while at what had turned out to be one of the greatest practical jokes and farces they had ever known.

As Josh's "dander" went down the more did he congratulate himself on his escape, but how to account for the "blood" continued to puzzle him.

He retired at once to his room and put on a clean shirt, the one he had on being badly spattered, and in other ways fixed himself up, while Dick and his companions consulted and laughed.

On coming down stairs the first person he met almost, was Colonel Suckerbait, who at once put on looks of anxiety, although he knew, of course, all about the racket.

"Why, Josh, dear boy, where have you been?" was his first and anxious question.

"Why, b'gosh, I fit that duel, of course," said Josh, proudly.

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Suckerbait.

"You bet I did. No slouch 'bout me when I get my dander up."

"Good gracious! I was afraid you had gone, when I couldn't find you anywhere. Well?"

"I'm all here, b'gosh!" said he, thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his vest.

"Well, so I see. But how about your opponent?"

"Wal, he warn't hurt so bad but that he got up an' dusted arter ther first shot, goldarn him."

"I am glad of that. Now, Josh, do see if you can't behave yourself and keep out of trouble. Why it is that you are forever in some scrape or other I don't understand. I never get into any such trouble," said Suckerbait, reprovingly.

"Wal, it war all Becky's fault."

"But you should never have promised to marry her and then acted as you did."

"Wal, maybe; but I war only tryin' to make Angie jealous," said Josh, laughing.

"And have you succeeded?"

"I don't know yet. But I didn't expect all this fuss about it."

"Probably not. But take my advice, Josh, and have nothing to do with the sex, for you never know what scrapes and dangers they will get you into."

Josh reflected deeply on this advice, for although he was dreadfully stuck on Miss Vandevere, he knew

by sad experience that what the colonel had said was true.

That night when they all assembled at the theater, the geying was continued in the shape of compliments and congratulations (from all but Becky) until Josh began to regard himself as a hero, and wondered what Angie really thought.

Even Dunellen, who had appeared on the scene of battle as James Kutejack, Becky's cousin and champion, had the cheek to shake hands with him and to compliment him on his bravery.

Becky kept entirely away from him, of course, while Angie had a more difficult part to play—that of a woman struggling between two emotions.

But Dick called Josh's attention to the fact, her actions assuring him that he had undoubtedly won a strong and lasting place in her heart; and Josh thought so, too, although he made up his mind to let her suffer awhile longer yet, just to pay her off in her own coin before making love to her again.

Josh felt himself to be some pumpkins.

But the next morning's papers paralyzed and broke him all up again, for not only was the whole snap of the duel given dead away in cold type, but his name and connection with the combination given very conspicuously.

Indeed, either Dick Dingle or a very ingenious and humorous reporter had worked the thing up for all it was worth, and before noon he was the laughing-stock of the whole city.

Now the blood was accounted for, and the hurried retreat of his enemy from the ensanguined field.

Dick, however, still acted his part and pretended to be exceedingly indignant at the game that had been played upon them, insisting upon it that Josh's pistol was properly loaded, and his bad aim was the only excuse for not bringing down his man.

This made him solid with Josh, but what was to make Josh solid with the laughing public?

That night the theater was packed, as much on this account as any other, and when Josh came upon the stage, he was received with shouts of laughter as the hero and victim of the mock duel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Yes, Joshua Sheepshank was undoubtedly the hero of Richmond that night, on account of his being the hero of that duel.

The audience laughed and roared so while he was on the stage that it interrupted the performance very much, and at the fall of the curtain on the first act, he was loudly called for.

But he felt very little like responding, for by this time he understood quite as well as the public did that he had been the victim of a terrible sell, and that the object in calling him out was solely to have another good square laugh at him.

So he hung back and refused to go in front of the curtain for a long time, although the cry was still kept up for him in front.

Finally Dick Dingle went to him.

"Go on, Josh. Never mind the laugh. Just laugh yourself and show them that you regard it as a joke," said he.

"But, b'gosh, I don't," said he, emphatically.

"Well, make them think you do. It's the easiest way out of it. Go on," and pulling aside the curtain he almost pushed him out before it and the laughing multitude.

"Three cheers for Josh Sheepshank!" somebody cried, and you bet those cheers were given, but loudly mingled with laughter.

Josh bowed and started to retire, when the cry of "Speech! Speech!" broke from every portion of the house, and Dick, standing at the side of the curtain, motioned him to go back.

Blushing and reluctant he did so, but so far as making a speech was concerned, everything seemed to have been laughed out of him.

But he finally made an attempt.

"Feller-citizens, I—I—"

Here the laughter broke in again, and was so boisterous as to break him all up; but waiting a moment, he got another chance.

"Oh, it's all right, feller-citizens; but I didn't weaken, did I?" he asked.

That fact they all understood, and Josh had happened to put it just right.

He had not weakened, so far as the public knew; and so, after the laugh was played out, he really did become something of a hero in the minds of many, although there could be no doubt but that the laugh would cling to the exploit as long as it was remembered.

But the play was not interrupted any further that night, and indeed it was quite a success during their stay in Richmond—such a potency is there in advertising, no matter how it is done, so long as it attracts public attention.

But for all that, Josh was greatly puzzled to know who had put up the job on him, although he never for a moment suspected Dick Dingle.

From Richmond they went to Washington, where they billed for a week at Ford's.

Josh had always wanted to visit Washington; not that he had any political aspirations, but he was very fond of seeing noted places and points of historical interest, and Washington is well supplied with them. Indeed, it may well be said that the "woods are full of them."

But one thing must be borne in mind, and that is that Josh Sheepshank made no more love to Miss Claudia Kutejack. Oh, no, he was not so much of a hog as he had been once, for he now knew when he had had enough.

The laugh was deeply on him, and he resolved to posture very low for a time to come.

But he could not get over his love for Miss Vandevere.

It had been a "mash" with him from the start, which he couldn't forget, in spite of all the jokes that had been played upon him on account of it.

The way to her heart looked rather dusky, but he hoped to arrive there yet in spite of drawbacks, in spite of her studied indifference to him.

As for the young lady herself, indeed, as for both Miss Vandevere and Miss Kutejack, they congratulated themselves on having escaped his attentions entirely, and yet Miss Kutejack said one day:

"He has some sugar yet, eh?"

"Yes, about five hundred, I believe," answered Miss Vandevere.

"Five hundred cases!" exclaimed the other, "why, Vandy, we don't want to give him the dead shake yet, do we?"

"Why not?"

"Well, suppose we get stranded."

"All right if we do. I'll have no more to do with getting money out of him. If you want to do it, go ahead. I'm done."

"Well, I'll just think about that. I hate to see five centuries lying around loose and liable to get lost," mused Claudia.

"Oh, never fear, he'll hang on to it. You couldn't get it out of him with a steam corkscrew," replied Miss Vandevere.

"But you could."

"I don't know about that. But you may bet I'm not going to try. I've had all that fun I want."

"Oh, well; but don't cut him cold, for we may need him yet. Set Gracie Montrose on him."

"Bah! she hates the sight of him. Guess you'll have to keep him on the string yourself, Jack."

"Well, I don't like the idea very much, but I do hate to see so much sugar going to waste and wholly unappropriated to the good of art," and at that the matter dropped for the time.

Yes; there was Josh Sheepshank, in the capital of his country.

The city of George Washington.

The city of long distances and wide avenues.

The Mecca of politicians.

The city where the bald-headed eagle has his errie.

Where Columbia keeps house and her servants dish out at the public crib.

Where two presidents have been assassinated, and where many other politicians would like to take chances on it.

In short, great and magnificent Washington.

Josh gazed around, dazed and bewildered by the stupendousness which he saw around him on every hand.

The Capitol, the Patent Office, the Department of Justice, the White House, and the hundreds of other structures of national importance and pride.

The Washington Monument, finished at last, and higher than the Pyramids, as it should be, since it is in honor of a greater man than they ever looked down upon—and Josh almost lost his breath.

"Great everlasting gosh!" he would exclaim every now and then, as new sights and wonders dawned upon him. "I'll be forever an' forever clobbered if this 'ere don't beat all natur'—It does, b'gosh! Wal, now," said he, as he stood in front of the Capitol and gazed up and down its grand and beautiful outlines until his eyes rested for a moment on the Goddess of Liberty that crowns the magnificent pile, "maybe somebody wants to say that we arn't a great nation! Maybe somebody thinks we can't lick all creation! Wal, I should gather myself up for a smile! What's pot-bellied England? What's them durned Algerians an' Mexicans? What's them pesky Injuns? Oh! they arn't nowhar," said he, forgetting—if he ever knew—that this same Capitol had been taken and burned by those same "pot-bellied" Englishmen once.

"Gosh darn my off steer, but we can wallop all creation! Fetch 'em on!" and he was wildly gesticulating around the park, in front of the Capitol, when a meek-eyed man approached him.

"Sir, I have seen better days," he began.

"Wal, I'll be gosh darned if ever I did," replied Josh, decidedly. "No man can see better days than when he is looking on so much greatness. I'm a true Yankee, b'gosh! My father, an' grandfather fit for this country like thunder, an' I'm just red hot glad when I can look on a scene like this an' recollect that I'm part owner in it, b'gosh."

"My dear sir, I perceive you are a patriot," said the meek-eyed man, bowing.

"You can just bet your bates I am!"

"Just such men as I love to meet. I have worked for my country, lo! these many years, and am not unknown to fame; but fell misfortune has marked me for its own," said he, as he took a seat on one of the benches and bowed his head.

"You don't say so!"

"Yes. I at one time held an important office of public trust under—lift your hat while I pronounce the name!" said he, setting the example.

Josh's eyes bulged out and he lifted his hat.

"Under the great, the good, the god-like martyr, Abraham Lincoln!"

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. Excuse me for not giving you my name; my pride forbids. But I was once the trusted friend of and a fellow public servant with that illustrious man. At his untimely death all became changed, and under Johnson's administration I was forgotten and left out in the cold. From that moment I have been falling steadily lower until actual want now fastens its fangs upon me," and he mopped his tears with a dirty handkerchief.

Josh felt sorry, and was on the point of staking him to the extent of a dollar.

"Yes, and the worst of it is that I am at last compelled to part with this cane, for a long time the prop-

erty of Abraham Lincoln, and by him presented to me as a token of his friendship."
 More swabbing up of brine.
 "Jewhittaker! Just let me take that in my hands," replied Josh, earnestly.
 With a sigh, the sad-eyed stranger obliged him.
 "A most valuable relic of the great president, the second savior of his country," he added.
 "Jerusalem crickets!" mused Josh, fondling rather an ordinary hickory stick.
 "You may well be proud of handling it, if you are a lover of your country, my dear sir."
 "Wal, I should say so!"
 "And I am obliged to sell it to obtain bread for my family. 'Tis sad, 'tis hard," he sighed.
 "I should like that to give to my old dad, who fit for his country an' his father before him."

"Take it and hand it down to your latest posterity. Let it be known to them that it belonged to the man who is destined to live in history with Washington." Josh counted out the money which the sad-eyed man took, and bowing with a sigh, walked sadly away, while Josh was delighted.
 Right in front of the theater, where Dick Dingle, Harry Pratt, and two or three others were standing, that man, no longer sad-eyed, met one of his acquaintances.
 "Hello, Cully, put it there!" said he, extending his hand to him.
 "What for?" asked the friend, as they shook.
 "Just worked the nicest racket on a jay that you ever saw. Met him up here in the Capitol grounds, and come the patriotic on him."
 "How?"

traveling all over the country, the memory of it soon died out.

Indeed, it might never have come up to their minds again had not Josh Sheepshank soon after swaggered up to the group with his great and almost invaluable purchase.

"Hello, Josh," said Dick, cheerily, and the others said something to him carelessly.

Josh held up his cane.

"Come out from under yer hats," said he.

"What?"

"Come out," and he doffed his own.

"What for?" asked Dick.

"Look at that cane."

"Oh, yes."

"It was once the property of Abraham Lincoln."

"What?" they all cried, starting.



The very deuce seemed to possess the fellows, for they laughed and roared. They slapped each other on the backs and then roared some more. They kicked each other and laughed. "What in thunder's the matter with you?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

"Indeed, he would prize it highly."

"Guess he would, b'gosh. How much'll you take for it, anyhow?" he finally asked.

"Oh, my dear sir, how can I set a price on a relic like that? Don't ask me to," and that sad-eyed man looked as though he had cramps in his stomach.

"Wal, sorter hint round, so I can see if it is too big for my pile or not."

"Oh, it rends my heart."

"Wal, yes, I s'pose so; but what's the least you'll take for it?"

"Alas! Well, say fifty dollars," said he, finally.

"Fifty dollars! Great Moses!" exclaimed Josh.

"But think of what you get for it."

"Yes, an' what I give."

"But as time rolls on that relic will be all but priceless. Nations and states will contend for it."

"Wal, guess they may contend. I can't pay that for it, altho' I'd like to have it," said Josh.

"Alack-a-day!" sighed the sad-eyed man.

"No, it's a lack of money."

"Name a price, if you please, for my wants are many and pressing."

"Wal, say twenty-five dollars."

"Great heavens!" moaned the man.

"That's ther best I can do, b'gosh."

"Oh, say thirty! Never let it be said that an American patriot would only pay twenty-five dollars for a cane once owned by Abraham Lincoln."

"Wal, there's a darned good many patriots as couldn't afford it, yu know."

"True, alas, too true, and I am one of them. Well, you may have it for twenty-five dollars, but it nearly breaks my heart."

"And nearly breaks my pocket."

"Well, you know that old hickory stick I had?"

"Yes."

"Well, I stood that jay up with a terrible ghost story 'bout its once belonging to Abe Lincoln, and sold it to him for twenty-five cases."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed his pal.

"Fact. Here's the shug. Struck him for fifty, but he squealed; and with tears in my lamps, I finally let him have it for twenty-five. Come in and take a drink!"

"Well, I should smile!" ejaculated the other, following his lead to the nearest saloon.

Dick and his companion swapped smiles. They had heard of many sharp snaps by sharpers to raise the wind, but to a certain extent this was a new one.

"What we want to do is to look out for the sharp who will probably be coming after us presently, wanting us to buy the sword of George Washington," said Dick, laughing.

"Or the back comb worn by Martha," suggested Harry Pratt.

"Or the toothpick of John Adams."

"Or the pen—the identical pen—used by the signers of the Declaration of Independence."

"Or the kite which Ben Franklin flew to demonstrate that lightning and electricity were identical."

"Or the original model of Fulton's steamboat."

"Or a piece of the crack in the old Independence bell," suggested another, and amid laughter, many other suggestions were made.

But as the snaps of all sorts of sharpers were nothing new to members of the combination, who were

"This cane once belonged to Abraham Lincoln, an' don't yu forget it, b'gosh. Just paid a poor fellow twenty-five dollars for it," he added.

Then there arose a yell.

Josh looked hurt to think they would treat such a relic with levity.

The very deuce seemed to possess the fellows, for they laughed and roared.

They slapped each other on the backs and then roared some more.

They kicked each other and laughed.

Josh regarded them as off their plumb line.

"What in thunder's the matter with you?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

"Of course," said Harry Pratt.

"Who else would it be?"

"Who else could it be?"

"Who, but our sucker?" asked Dick.

"What's ther matter?" asked Josh.

"Of course; he was in town, and he was the one to buy Abe's cane," said Dick; and again there was laughing and shaking of hands.

"Wal, yu fellers seems to be havin' a heap of fun about something, but I want yu all to understand that I've got a prize here that is worth thousands," said he, proudly.

"What is it, Josh?" asked Dick, seriously.

"What is it?"

"Yes."

"Look at it!" said he, proudly holding up the cane, while the others gathered around to look at it.

"Well, a cane, eh?"

"I should say so."

"What about it?"

"Once owned by Abraham Lincoln!"
 "Nonsense!"
 "Straight I'm givin it tū yu, Dick."
 "Come off!"
 "No I won't!"
 "Where did you catch it?"
 "Bought it of a poor old broken-down politician up here by the Capitol."
 "How much?"
 "Twenty-five dollars. He struck me for fifty, but I wouldn't have it."
 "Oh, you wouldn't, eh? And who said he was a broken-down politician?"
 "Why, he did, an' he looked it."
 "And who said this was Abe Lincoln's cane?"
 "He did, of course. Abe gin it tū him an' he got so hard up he sold it tū me."
 "Know who he is?"
 "No, he didn't tell me his name."
 "Got any voucher for the pedigree of the stick?"
 "Wal, he told me all about it," said Josh.
 "Oh, he did, hey? Josh, will you never take salt?"
 "What for?"
 "Your freshness."
 "What's ther matter now?"
 "Oh, nothing, only you are the freshest rooster that ever went alone. Josh, I am sorry for you, but you have been badly sold."
 "How so?"

"Abraham Lincoln never saw that cane any more than you saw his sometime friend."
 "Git out!" cried Josh, indignantly.
 "Why, didn't you hear the grand laugh?"
 "Yes; what about?"
 "Why, the duffer who sold you that cheap stick for twenty-five cases was here only a moment ago, telling his pal, in our hearing, all about the snap. That's what caused the laugh."

Josh looked from one to the other a moment, and then started away, pounding the sidewalk with one end of the cane, and using his own mental end to calculate what an ass he was.

He walked for an hour or more before he felt in any mood to take in any of the other sights of Washington. But finally he concluded to get as near his money's worth as possible, by going through the Patent Office.

"Goldarn my bates, I want ter find a cage an' get locked up in it, for I'll bet a thousand million dollars to ten cents that I am the goshdarndest saphead that ever wore shoe leather. I will, b'gosh! Twenty-five dollars for a ten-cent stick!" said he, holding it up and looking at it. "I'd just like to meet that ere sad-eyed man with a starvin' family; goldarn our best yoke of steers if I wouldn't make half orphans on 'em in 'bout three shakes of a sheep's tail, that is, if they've got any mother. What a goldarned place this is! Why, they won't 'low a man tū be patriotic, for if he is, they'll skin him until he is ready tū go back on ther whole business. But I'd like tū see some other skunk come along an' get the best of me; if I didn't put wrinkles inter him, he'd take 'em out of me, b'gosh. What a goldarned skin that was! An' jst my luck. Dick and ther other fellers had tū hear all 'bout it an' get ther laugh on me."

But the attractions and novelties of the Patent Office soon broke in upon his regrets and reproaches, for he saw the models of some of the most famous inventions that the world has ever known.

And while contemplating these wonders and the sacred relics held in the archives there, he began to forget the perfidy of the human race, and to think again that Yankeedoodledom was the greatest nation on top of the earth.

But it was getting time for supper, for soon afterward he was expected to be behind the scenes, dressed for his part, for this was the first night in Washington (a bad show-town), and he was bound to do the best he could to make the piece a success.

So he concluded to take in the remainder of the Patent Office the following day, although it would have taken him at least a week, and started for his hotel.

At the foot of the grand stairway he met another sad-eyed man. But he was up on the bit.

"I beg pardon, sir, but having noticed that you linger fondly over the evidences of your country's skill, and seeing that you carry that much-prized relic of the great and good Lincoln, I thought perhaps that you would like to purchase a relic of Washington," said he, with a real stiff address.

"What?" exclaimed Josh, starting from him with a look that would have addled eggs.

"Simply the sword of Washington—the one he wore at Yorktown," and the stranger never sweat a hair.

"Washington's sword!" roared Josh.

"Yes, a fit companion relic to Lincoln's cane."

"Goldarn my old aunt's cat's tail!" howled Josh; and drawing off, he gave that peddler of relics a tremendous smash in the nose.

No more relics for him!

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOSH SHEEPSHANK struck out for liberty. That is to say, the liberty of being reasonably patriotic without being swindled on account of it.

He had had all he wanted of that sort of thing. He had bought a cane for twenty-five dollars which he was assured on the honor of a meek-eyed stranger had once belonged to Abraham Lincoln, and he had afterward learned how grievously he had been taken in.

That was all he wanted. Therefore when a man met him as he left the Patent Office and wanted to sell him the identical sword that General Washington wore at Yorktown, he kicked.

He also struck out.

And that would-be speculator in the relics of Washington went to grass.

But the worst of it was, he didn't stay there.

He got up and sent Josh there in the same way.

And Josh was knocked out of time.

That speculator saw his advantage and sat upon it. That is to say, he sat upon Josh Sheepshank, and when he began to recover from the knock-down blow, he began to argue with him.

"See here. You posture for an American patriot, don't you?" was his first question.

"None of your goldarned business. Lemme up!" roared Josh, struggling hard.

"No, sir. I refuse to let you up until you return to a state of reason. You cannot deceive me, sir; you are an American patriot. You have the cane of Abraham Lincoln, which is a fortune to any selfish man who might wish to sell it, and if you do not know that the sword of the first and the cane of the second Father of his Country belong together, I will enlighten you," said he, and Josh grunted on account of the pressure.

"Lemme up, goldarn yu!" said he.

"But this sword of Washington?"

"Go to thunder with yer goldarned old cheese-knife. I ain't buyin' no more relics."

"But you must."

"What?"

"The cane of Lincoln and the sword of Washington can never be separated. You have one and you must buy the other; there is no alternative."

"Lemme up, goldarn yu!"

"Yes, when you agree to buy the sword."

"I'll take the law on yu!"

"But the law is on my side, my dear sir. It has always been understood that the man who was fortunate enough to own the cane of Abe Lincoln should also possess the sword of Washington. It is unwritten but very powerful law."

"But this isn't Abe Lincoln's cane."

"Ah, my dear sir, you will excuse me; I know better; I know that relic too well. You have a prize, whether you know it or not; but your collection will not be complete without this," said he, poking the old sword under his nose.

"Lemme up, I tell yu!"

"Never. By the way, would you not regard it as an honor to be killed with the sword that Washington wore at Yorktown?"

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! Somebody stop him!" cried Josh, vehemently.

"Useless, my dear sir. Columbia, from her home on top of yonder dome, looks on and smiles. You must buy or die."

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" he groaned.

"Which will you do?" demanded the visitor.

"How much?" whined Josh.

"Fifty dollars."

"Oh, Lord!" and this time he fairly moaned.

He was in the power of either a shark or a crank, he didn't know which, but either was bad enough, and there seemed to be nobody around.

"So you choose to die by the sword, eh? Well, I don't know but it shows your patriotism quite as much as the buying of it would," and he raised the blade to dispatch his trembling victim.

"Ah! stop, stop! I'll buy it," said Josh.

"Well, pull out your money."

"But I can't with yu sittin' on me. Lemme up."

"No nonsense?"

"No, of course not. Get off."

"I'll trust you, but beware that you do not attempt to take advantage of my generosity," said the man, slowly rising.

Josh was not long in getting upon his pins.

He glanced hurriedly around to see if any assistance was within call, but there was no one.

"Shell out that soap."

So Josh concluded to shell out and see what he could do afterwards.

Reluctantly he counted fifty dollars from his boodle.

"There," said he, handing it to him.

"Kereck. Now there's your precious relic," said he, presenting the old cavalry sword to his victim. "Take good care of it. The country will gladly pay you ten thousand dollars for it in a few years," he added, and then turning, walked away.

"Goldarn yu and an yer old stabber," growled Josh. "But I'll fix yu if there's any law in Washington," he added, walking slowly after him.

By the strangest luck he met a policeman.

"Arrest that man, officer, and I'll prefer charges agin him," said he pointing to the man, who had already scented danger and quickened his pace.

"What has he been doing?" asked the officer.

"Robbin' me, goldarn his plecter; arrest him!"

The officer knew his man, and soon had him on the way to the station-house, followed by Josh Sheepshank.

Josh stated his case.

The fellow was searched and locked up.

"I know him," said the captain. "He is a crank as well as a swindler—a sucker hunter as well as a relic hunter. I have heard of his trying to sell this old cavalry sword as the one worn by Washington, but this is the first time I ever heard of his forcing anybody to buy it. Guess he must have got hard up."

"Wal, I want my money," said Josh. "This isn't ther first time I've been skinned here. A fellow humbugged me inter buyin' a cane that he said belonged to Abe Lincoln once, an' I gin him twenty-five dollars for it, and arterwards found out I'd been humbugged."

"Oh, the Washington sharps are up to all those little dodges! But we'll fix this fellow. Here is your fifty dollars, and after your evidence has convicted

him, as it undoubtedly will, just see if you cannot steer clear of these fellows in the future."

"Wal, but goldarn their eyes, I didn't go for them—they went for me," replied Josh.

"Well, in that case, either knock them down or call an officer."

"I did knock this fellow down, b'gosh."

"You did?"

"Yes, an' then he up 'n knocked me down, an' set on top of me, b'gosh, an' threatened tū saw my head off if I didn't buy his sword."

"Well, you must look out for yourself, that is all I can tell you. The city is full of sharks, and they are always on the lookout for suckers. Come around to the court in an hour."

"I'll do it, b'gosh. I'll fix one on 'em," and he was as good as his word.

But he convulsed the spectators and court by the comical detailment of his adventures with the sharps, especially the second one.

By this it will be seen that Dick Dingle did not put everything on Josh, for in the two instances last mentioned of his being sold, Dick had nothing to do with it farther than joining with others in the laugh.

The fact of the matter was, Josh Sheepshank was one of those fellows who invite sells upon themselves, and who are forever putting their big foot in it.

Josh should have remained at home on the farm, and married Dolly Dimple. Nature intended him for a Vermont farmer, and in time he might have achieved the dignity of a state legislator.

But to be thrown upon an active world, especially with ten thousand dollars, knowing as little as he did about the sharps and flats of existence, was too much for him.

He was out of his native element.

He had never seen the world before, and had begun to take it in too late in life.

But he had heard of Jim Fisk, Jay Gould, and dozens of others who had gone from the country and made great marks and fortunes in the city.

He was a country boy, and besides, he had ten thousand good dollars to start with.

He struck out, but the alluring advertisement of Colonel Suckerbait first caught his eye.

Almost any other might have caught him just as quickly, but it happened to be this; and there was Angella Vandever to close the bargain, and clinch it with her captivating smiles.

The reader knows the rest.

But I have been led to make these remarks for fear the impression might obtain that Dick Dingle was the cause of all his sorrows, when in reality, as the reader knows, he never would have received back the money he was robbed of, in an emergency of course, had it not been for mischievous, but honest-hearted Dick Dingle.

Yes, Josh Sheepshank should have remained at home on the farm. He could have managed that first-rate without doubt, but he was no match for the world of sharps existing outside of that honest, happy, bucolic life. And if many things have happened him, it is as much his fault as anybody's, and simply because he is widely out of his element. And they probably will continue to happen to him until he gets back again into the element for which nature fitted him.

And while we are moralizing, this fate of Josh Sheepshank may well be taken by a large number of ambitious country boys, stage-struck or ambitious to strike for a fortune, and laid close to their hearts, pasted into their hats, so to speak, for a sort of warning. Where you find one Jim Fisk or Jay Gould, you will find a thousand Josh Sheepshanks.

Make a note of that.

Peter Pad gives it to you for a "pointer."

Remember the old maxim: "A pointer is a pointer."

"Let the shoemaker stick to his last."

The great trouble, however, seems to be to decide upon what constitutes a fellow's "last."

But your old friend who has amused you for so many years, gives you another "pointer."

Your "last" consists in what you are best fitted for, and in nine cases out of ten it will be found to be what you have been brought up to.

So find your "last" as early as you can in life; then stick to it, and you'll succeed, be it shoemaker, farmer, statesman, or speculator. The ambition to be something that nature never intended you to be is about like the ambition of a chicken to swim in imitation of young ducks.

But Joshua Sheepshank, having left his "last" and tried to become a Jim Fisk or a Jay Gould, is on our hands, and we must see him through.

Business in Washington was very bad, for it so happened that Gus Williams, with his play of "One of the Finest" was there that week, and the consequence was that the Great New York Combination was "badly left."

So they went from there to Baltimore, where they were also billed for a week.

Here they had a trifle better luck, although they scarcely paid expenses.

The majority of the company were for getting back to New York as quickly as possible, believing that the season was not only bad, but that the play and the players were quite as bad, everything considered, for there were some fine companies on the road.

But Colonel Suckerbait would not listen to it. His idea was to go south, along the Atlantic coast cities, then from Mobile, Alabama, to continue on to New Orleans, thence up the Mississippi as far as St. Louis, and then make a bold overland strike toward the east.

And his chin-music prevailed.

They worked a few unimportant towns until they

struck Charleston, S. C., and here it so happened that they did a very good business.

And then they continued on to Savannah, Ga., where they were to hold forth a week, after which they were to take in the less important towns on the route to Mobile.

But it was at Savannah that there were a few indications of fun, which was a trifle noteworthy, for there had been scarcely anything of the kind for a long time.

It will be remembered that Josh was badly "out" with both Angella Vandevere and Miss Katejack. Indeed, of late he had been attending strictly to business in the hope of redeeming his already lost ten thousand dollars.

At Savannah there is a well known resort sometimes called the "Elephant," from the fact of their hav-

coming out from behind the bar with evident pleasure.

He went to the telephone box and rang the bell in regulation style.

A return ring came back, and the barkeeper took the ear trumpet in his left hand, and with his smiling mouth, loud enough to be heard all around:

"Say, Billy, is Dick Dingle over there?"

Then, of course, Josh could not hear the reply. But by this time he knew all about telephones.

"Yes, he has just got there and wants you to come to the instrument," said the affable barkeeper, handing Josh the ear trumpet. "Just call."

"Hello, Dick!" Josh called, and just then the whole front of the machine came out, and a fist predominated, which struck Josh bang in the face, knocking him plumb over.

"No; come right out here to the bar and make it seem as though we had just come in," said Dick, and they all sauntered out to the bar.

Josh soon came out, looking a trifle sad, but Dick greeted him cheerfully.

"Ah, there! How now?"

"Wal, I—I've been here," said Josh.

"How long?"

"'Bout ten minits."

"Well, we just went out for a moment. How are things? What are you calling for?"

"Wal, a little apple juice."

"Say," said he, taking Dick to one side.

"What?" asked Dick.

"That thing over there," said he, pointing to the telephone.

"The telephone?"



"Lemme up, goldarn yu!" said he. "But this sword of Washington?" "Go to thunder with yer goldarned old cheese-knife, I arn't buyin' no more relics." "But you must."

ing a mechanical elephant there that has been known to play many tricks on strangers.

Dick Dingle of course measured the whole city up without loss of time and took in the mechanical curiosities of this resort the first night.

The next day he took Josh around there and treated him to the soda, at the same time pointing out to him the curiosities of the place, consisting of rare pictures and oddities of various sorts.

And he and the man behind the bar exchanged confidential winks when he introduced Josh to him as one of the proprietors of that great show.

Josh liked to be introduced around in that way, for he had a good-sized bump of self-esteem and delighted in being known as an actor and one of the boys.

That night after the show, Dick said to Josh: "Meet me at the 'Elephant' at twelve, for we are going to have some fun there."

And you may bet high that Josh agreed to it and was on hand at the appointed time, for had he not been introduced there as one of the proprietors of the great New York Combination?

Well, rather!

Meantime the male members of the company had assembled there and were in a private room from which they could see without being seen.

Josh came in five or ten minutes ahead of time. "Ah!" said the barkeeper. "Good-evening, Mr. Sheepshank. Did you meet your friend, Dick Dingle?"

"No, has he been here?" asked Josh, looking at his watch.

"Yes, only a few moments ago, and he said he would be over to Confederacy Hall. Wait a moment. I have telephonic connection with the Hall and I will see if he is there," said that genial and obliging barkeeper,

But the mechanism of the contrivance drew back the fist again before he had time to comprehend.

Josh rose slowly to his feet, looking wild.

"Did he speak?" asked the polite barkeeper.

"Speak!" growled Josh, holding his nose in his hand. "Wal, I should say so! He didn't only speak, but somebody hit me."

"Hit you?"

"Yes; whar is ther son of a gun?" he asked, looking wildly around.

But there was nobody within striking distance, and he seemed confused.

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Sheepshank. Try it again."

"Not much. I'm no hog," said Josh, as he nursed his punched organ.

"Shall I speak to him for you?"

"Du anything yu darn please."

"All right," and going to the face of the instrument he called, loud enough for Josh to hear:

"Dick Dingle," and of course he could not hear the response.

"Why, certainly, he is here. Come over," was the reply that Josh heard, and then he turned to him and said:

"Dick will be over here right away."

"Goldarn funny," growled Josh. "Say, where is your wash-room?" asked Josh, holding his bleeding nose.

"Right this way."

And the bar-keeper led him in and out of two or three unnecessary doors and finally into a wash-room, after which he went out into the saloon again to swap laughs with Dick and the other fellows who were in waiting.

"Tell him we just came in," said Harry Pratt.

"Yes. I tried to speak to yu just a minute ago, an' somethin' hit me."

"Nonsense."

"Fact; just been washin' my nose."

"Oh, go shy! Telephones never hit anybody."

"Wal, somethin' hit me."

"It must have been an idea, Josh."

And although he didn't believe it, he joined with the others in cringing apple juice, for if he had been deceived he didn't want to give himself away.

"Been drinking much cider to-night, Josh?"

"Fast drop to-night; why?"

"Well, I didn't know. You seemed to be so broken up about that telephone," mused Dick.

"Wal, it was goldarned queer anyhow. I was just a speakin' to yu when somebody or somethin' hit me a belt in the nose."

"Nonsense!"

"B'gosh, yu wouldn't call it nonsense if it hit yoa," replied Josh.

"Oh, you simply imagined it."

"Git out! Imagine it when ther blood streams out o' my nose? Guess not."

"Oh, well, we will not argue the matter; come and sit down in the back room," said Dick, leading the way back to where they had so lately come from.

"Bring some cigars, Mr. Barkeeper," he called, and in a few minutes they were all smoking.

"This is a great place," ventured Dunellen.

"Well, I should say so!" ejaculated Harry Pratt.

"Oh, but that mechanical elephant takes the cake," added Dick.

"Cake! Didn't know that elephants lived on cakes," said Josh, thinking he had said a cute thing.

"Well, this one does."

"How so?"

"Hang me if I know. But they say it is a great piece of mechanism, and that if you approach it with some sort of vegetable or cake, it will raise its trunk and take it from you. But if you bring it anything it does not like, it will not notice you at all, I don't believe it."

"No more do I. The idea of investing mechanism with reasoning and discriminating powers is altogether too absurd," said Dick, nudging Josh.

"Wal, I should say so. Say, Dick, s'pose we try it on something?" he added.

"All right. What can we get?" asked Dick, all enthusiasm.

"Wait a minit," and he went to the barkeeper, while the others were exchanging winks, soberly.

"Say, what does the elephant like?" he asked.

"Well, he likes turnips pretty well," replied the barkeeper.

"Got any?"

"Yes. But, say, want to play a joke on him?"

"How?"

"I've got a turnip here with a pepper inside of it. Try him with that and you'll see some fun."

Josh consulted with Dick.

"Oh, that's all nonsense, Josh. The idea that a mechanical elephant should know the difference between a pepper and a turnip. But you can try it if you like."

And Josh liked.

If there was any fun to be had he wanted it.

So he took the prepared turnip and approached the mechanical elephant.

He almost might as well have gone and jumped off the dock.

That mechanical elephant was fixed. There was a platform on which the experimenter had to step and that set things in motion.

It set that mechanical elephant in motion and its trunk at once coiled around poor Josh Sheepshank.

It seemed like a live elephant, for it lifted him high in air and held him aloft as though in sportive play or on the point of avenging an insult.

"Help! help!" cried Josh; but he really seemed to be out of human reach.

CHAPTER XXV.

"STOP it!" cried Josh, as the trunk of the mechanical elephant held him aloft in his agony of fear.

But that mechanical elephant was wound up and putting in its work.

The gang was watching it.

This was in Savannah, Georgia, and several good Georgians were there to witness the workings, and among them Col. Shackelford, a Southern thoroughbred, who happened to be in Savannah at the time.

The Great New York Combination had got as far as Savannah, bound by way of Mobile, Alabama, to New Orleans, and thence up the Mississippi river to St. Louis, from which point they were to take a due line east via various railroad routes.

It was a terrible racket that Dick Dingle had got Josh Sheepshank on, but when he yelled "murder" and wanted to be let up on, the whole apparatus instantly relaxed, and Josh was placed on his feet again.

"Gosh darn it!" was his first expression.

Dick Dingle was of course quickly at his side.

"What is the matter, Josh?" he asked.

"Matter! Thunder! Don't you see?"

"No! What were you trying to do?"

"Why, the barkeeper said as how if I wanted to see some fun I should give the elephant some turnip, with a pepper in it," he growled, shaking his fist at him.

"And you did, didn't you?"

"I did, by thunder, lot's of it."

"Well, do you expect sympathy?"

"Wal, Dick, how is it, anyhow?" he asked, seemingly bewildered.

"Oh! you are away off, Josh."

"How so?" he demanded.

"Why? That's a great question for you to ask. Say, didn't you know any better than to play a trick on so sagacious an animal as an elephant?"

"But I didn't play any trick, b'gosh."

"You just said you did."

"No. I was just goin' to, when ther darned old critter lifted me. What sort of an elephant is it, anyhow?"

"An African lifter," suggested the barkeeper, and again everybody laughed.

"Wal, b'gosh, I should say so! I should call him a lifter an' a hugger, too. What sort of a goldarned place is this, anyhow? Fust the telephone knocks me down, and then a goshdarned elephant lifts an' squeezes me. Darned queer place, I guess," he added, looking suspiciously around.

"What's the matter with that telephone?" asked Dick.

"Goldarned if I know. But it's ther fust one I ever seen that would knock a feller down just for talking to it. Guess it was some trick."

"Nothing of the kind," put in the barkeeper.

"Just you try it," he said to Dick.

"Why, cert," and Dick went to the instrument, rang up the "central office," and was answered, so far as anyone not in the secret knew.

"Hallo, central!" he called, and then listened.

"Anything the matter with the connections?"

"Why?" "Well, there must be something wrong, for a man was just knocked down at the transmitter."

Dick was seen to laugh after listening a moment.

"What do they say?" asked Josh.

"They say there was probably a blamed fool at the instrument and got struck by lightning," replied Dick,

ringing as though to break the circuit, while the others laughed long and loudly.

"I don't believe it," growled Josh.

"Fact. He says it always works that way under such circumstances."

"I'll punch his head if I get a chance."

"No, Josh; I guess the better thing for you to do is to set up the cider for the boys," said Dick.

"Wal, I don't like it," he said, savagely.

"All right. Take something else then."

"No. I mean I don't like this treatment."

"Neither do we. Come, don't stay under water so long," said Dick, suggestively.

"Stay under water!" exclaimed Josh.

"Yes. Come to the surface and shout."

"Shout! What for?"

"For the cider, of course."

"Wal, set up ther cider, mister, but all the same, I don't like this business," he growled.

"Don't be so fresh then. Will you never get your pipe colored?" asked Dick.

"Goshdarn it, I've got my eye colored."

"Well, that isn't the first black eye you have got on account of a lack of salt. But here's looking at you," he added, drinking his cider.

Josh was inclined to be indignant, but he gave that mechanical elephant a wide berth.

They laughed and talked for a while, and finally he became a trifle more reconciled, but saying all the while, at a safe distance, that he would thrash the Central Office operator on sight.

"I say; better be careful," suggested the barkeeper.

"Why?" asked Josh, turning to him.

"Well, because these Central fellows can hear all you say, and they are always looking for a fight."

Josh at once became as quiet as a lamb.

And after some more cider and conversation the wink again went around, and the conversation gradually changed to sporting and athletic matters.

"How are you at the pulling machine?" the barkeeper asked of Dick.

"Oh, I don't know. I haven't tried one of them for a long time," he replied, carelessly.

"See that over there in the wall?" he asked, pointing to a dial indicator in the wall, by the side of which were two rings attached to ropes that came out of small holes in the ceiling.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Oh, one of those new fashioned pullers," and to show how it worked, he placed his back to the wall and the indicator, and taking a ring in either hand, proceeded to brace himself and pull, or rather push upon them with all his might, sending the pointer on the indicator up to about two hundred.

Then Dick tried it in the same way, but without showing quite so much strength.

Finally they all tried it but Josh, who stood looking on with much interest, all the while believing that he could best the lot of them.

"Boys," he finally said, just as they expected and wanted him to say, "I'll bet the cider for the party that I can pull more than any of yer."

"All right, Josh, I'm willing," said Dick, and so they all said.

It was agreed that they should all test their strength and the result marked down in honest figures, after which Josh was to try it.

And first one and then another pulled, but as before, the barkeeper showed the highest.

All was now ready, and Josh pulled off his coat and threw it upon a chair.

He took the rings in his hands and braced himself for a herculean effort.

As he did so, the barkeeper touched a button that was concealed under the bar.

The next instant Josh was receiving a mule-power electric shock.

He yelled, jumped, kicked, contorted, and his hair stood on end and his eyes bulged out as big as eggs.

"What in thunder is the matter with you?" cried Dick.

"Are you giving us a song and dance?"

"Oh, oh! What is it?" he asked with chattering teeth.

"I give it up, unless it is a crazy breakdown."

"Stop it!—goshdarn it!—stop it!" he cried.

"Stop what?" they all asked.

"Stop it!" he yelled again.

"Stop what?"

"Pull, you lubber, pull!" roared the barkeeper.

"It's killin' me!"

"It! What?"

"Oh, oh, thunder!"

"Do you weaken?"

"Y—y—yes!" he said, chattering, and as he did so that button was released, the current broken, and the laugh raised high.

The reader probably knows that it was quite impossible for the victim to let go of the handles so long as the current was kept up, but the instant it was broken, Josh dropped the rings and turned to look at the indicator.

"Thunderation, what sort of a machine du yer call that, anyhow?" he asked.

"Why, a lifting machine of course," they all said.

"Liftin'! I should think it was a thunder an' lightnin' machine or a fever an' ague dispensary."

"What are you giving us?" asked Dick, as he tried very hard to keep a sober face.

"What in thunder be yer givin' me, b'gosh?"

"Oh, you are doing funny business."

"That won't work, old man; you've lost," said the barkeeper.

"Lost!" exclaimed Josh.

"Certainly. Oh, you're no good anyhow. You found you hadn't the sand in you to win, and so you weakened into funny business," and to show that he was still the winner, he took the now harmless rings in his hands and pulled two hundred again.

Josh looked on with eyes still bulging.

"Come, Josh, I never knew you to weaken like that before," said Dick.

"Weaken?"

"Well, I should say so. You've lost the bet."

"What was the matter with you anyhow?" asked Harry Pratt, as Josh put on his coat.

"Matter! Why I cum mighty near havin' the dinner shaken out of me, that's what's ther matter."

"Oh, that's too thin," said Dick.

"Who shook you?"

"Goshdarned if I know."

"Oh, come off!"

"Yes, give us a rest on that shake. If you don't want to pay for the cider, I will," said Dick.

"But I didn't lose."

"Yes you did."

"Wal, it wasn't fair."

"What wasn't?"

"That—that shakin' an'—"

"Oh, drop on yourself!"

"But I tell you I didn't have a fair chance."

"Want another one?" asked the barkeeper, quickly.

"No, b'gosh, I don't," said he.

"Well, will you sound the bugle?"

"Sound ther bugle?" in amazement.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For cider."

"Yes, goshdarn my luck. I'm in for it agin," he added, growlingly.

And they drank the cider that he paid for with much merriment and laughter.

"Wonder what's ther matter with me, anyhow?" he mused, still eying the "lifter."

"Nothing, only you can't pull," said the barkeeper.

Josh made no reply, for he began to think that he couldn't, himself. But what did it mean?

He sauntered over to the machine and cautiously took one of the rings and examined it. Then he took the other one. They both appeared to be harmless.

"Try it again," said Harry Pratt.

"Not for ther cider, b'gosh."

"Well, try it, anyhow, and let's see how much you can lift, anyhow."

Josh braced himself and pulled like a steer, recording over three hundred on the indicator, for he was as strong as a bull. But just as he had expended his utmost, that button was touched again, and it was instantly followed by a repetition of his former howl and dance.

But the current was kept up only a few seconds before he was once more released.

They all roared of course.

"That is a great act, Josh," suggested Dick.

"Act be goshdarned. I think it's sort of a trick that yer playin' on me, same's that telephone, an' if I thort it was, I'd lick somebody, b'gosh!" said he, striking the bar with his fist.

Just then a big man entered the place and stood looking around.

The barkeeper beckoned Josh one side, and in mysterious confidence said:

"See that big man there?"

"Yes," said Josh, wonderingly.

"Hush! He's the man from the Central office. He probably overheard what you said about him, and he's up here looking for fight."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Josh, and then he made a dive for the door and streaked it for his hotel.

And when it was explained to the boys, there was of course another laugh. In fact, Josh Sheepshank had once more unwittingly furnished them with an evenings rare sport.

Was there ever such a silly sucker known?

And yet, how many others would have fallen into some of the various traps set for him? The truth was, Josh was born green, so very green, that all the experience in the world couldn't ripen him.

But to turn to the company once more.

Business in Savannah was not good, and no more was it at Macon, Atlanta, and other large places, and in spite of its being a warm latitude, it was rather a cold day for The Great New York Combination.

Indeed, there had been no salaries paid for a whole month, and it began to look very much as though the "ghost" had been permanently laid and would never "walk" again.

Members of the company had been squeezed by Colonel Suckerbait to such an extent, and had paid their own expenses so often in the hope of better times, that they were nearly "strapped," individually, of the little they had saved.

Even Josh Sheepshank gave up little by little the reserve fund that he had, mostly at the solicitation of Angella Vandevere and Miss Kutejack, with both of whom he had made up, and was again on good terms, although he offered to make love to them no more.

Indeed, things looked so dubious all around that poor Josh, as well as others of the company felt very little like making love, or, indeed, anything else but money, which they were most in need of.

Colonel Suckerbait, however, didn't appear to lose courage. He felt certain that at Mobile they would make good all their losses and get on their feet again, although the others had less faith in it, and some of them were even talking about getting back to New York again by some means or other.

Josh was among the number.

Where now was his ten thousand dollars that he had started out in the world with, honestly intending to become a Fisk or a Jay Gould?

Well, somewhat scattered, so to speak.

Somewhat mixed up with different towns and expenses, experience thrown in.

And Josh was sick.

He sighed for home.

For the farm once more.

"To plow and to sow, to reap and to mow.
And be a farmer's boy."
Did not seem so distasteful as it formerly had, and he was homesick.

Homesick!
Aha, but the question of how he was ever to reach home became a serious one, unless they made a great pick-up at Mobile.

And it took all the money they could scrape together to get there. The company was ragged out and discouraged. The only one whose head went up and who kept continually to the front was Colonel Sucker-bait.

Dick Dingle saw how badly Josh Sheepbank looked, and although he was not feeling extra well himself, yet he could not resist the temptation to have a little fun with him.

"What will you do?"
"I'm goin' to skip out, by thunder," said Josh, slapping his hands together.

"Skip out?"

"Yes, b'gosh."

"Got any money?"
"No; every darned cent gone—sunk in this blasted show. But I'll walk clean back to Vermont afore I'll run the risk of gettin' put in the jug for debt."

"What! And give us the cold shake, the refrigeratorial vibration?"

"Wal, Dick, I'm sick. Here we are a thousand miles from home an' busted."

"Well, it looks like that," said Dick, sorrowfully.

"Where is my ten thousand dollars?"

"Ask the echoes, Josh."

"Full many an artist of our profession has been stranded here, and here are his remains. Full many a lyric and dramatic queen has given her last and best efforts here, only to fail, be held for debt, and finally, since friends in need are few indeed, have fretted away their shadowed lives, and not even the poor-master knows now where their graves are."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Josh, and by this time his eyes were sticking out like peeled onions.

"True 'tis a pity, and pity, 'tis 'tis true."

"Oh, don't quote Shakespeare, Dick. I'm all broke up. What in thunder shall I do?"

"Why, you are all right. Only wish I was in your shoes," replied Dick.

"What for?"

"You've got a rich governor and all you have to do



"What in thunder is the matter with you?" cried Dick. "Are you giving us a song and dance?" "Oh oh! What is it?" he asked with chattering teeth. "I give it up, unless it is a crazy breakdown." "Stop it!—goshdarn it!—stop it!" he cried.

It was a trifle cruel of Dick, but as he was sailing in the same boat with him, it did not seem quite so bad.

"Well, Josh, how are things?" he asked, after their arrival in Mobile.

"Things! What things?" he growled.

"Why, things in general."

"Wal, generally bad, b'gosh ermighty."

"What do you think of this stand?"

"Wal, it's a question whether we can stand with it," said he, sadly.

"Gracious, I hope we shall make good and get out of this state all right," said Dick, earnestly, so much so, in fact, that Josh looked at him inquiringly.

"Tough old state this to go broke in."

"Wal, I should say that most any state was a tough one to go broke in," replied Josh.

"Yes, but Alabama above all others."

"Why so?"

"Imprisonment for debt."

"Is that so?" and Josh opened his eyes.

"Well, I should say it was so, and sorry to say it," and Dick looked as serious as he knew how.

"Well, that's tough, b'gosh," mused Josh.

"Rather. But it is worse on non-citizens than on citizens. A citizen cannot be imprisoned longer than five years for a debt, but they take a stranger in and keep him cracking stones and making chairs until the debt is paid."

"Thunder an' blazes, yu don't say so?"

"Fact, I'm sorry to assure you."

"Great meat books!"

"So you see, if we don't do big business here, we shall be in for it sure," added Dick.

"Wal, b'gosh, I ain't goin' to stand it."

"An' they'll say 'where,' every time."

"It's too bad, too bad."

"Wal, I should so calkerlate, b'gosh. It's a gold-darned skin from fust to last. Oh, why didn't I put my money inter somethin' else or stayed to hum an' put it inter the bank? This ere show business is a gold-darned skin."

"Oh, no. We give the public the worth of their money every time, don't we?"

"Yes, goldarn 'em, but they don't respond an' give us money for what we give them. I wish to thunder I was out of it an' back on the farm agin, b'gosh. And here we've struck a gold-darned state where they jug yer for debt," he added, with a woe-begone look.

"That's so; but that isn't the worst of it."

"Not the worst of it?"

"I am sorry to say that it is not, Josh."

"Wal, what in thunder is ther worst then?"

"If it can be shown that the managers brought a bankrupt company into the state, they are liable to ten years in states prison, in addition to being kept there for debt."

Josh groaned, and nearly fell in a fit.

"Mobile is full of the bones of showmen."

"Good gracious!"

"Yes, Here has stranded many a show. Many an old circus tent lies rotting here. Many a fair scene that has proved the admiration of thousands may be found mouldering in many a garret in Mobile, while its Potter's Field is full of unmarked graves and showmen's bones, while those of many a noble circus horse or rare animal that once belonged to some menagerie enriches the surrounding soil."

"You don't say so!"

is to write to him for sugar, and then away you go. Scot free like a bird."

"No, by thunder! I'd walk home fust or rot in prison before I'd write him for money. The old folks told me when I left that I would make a goshdarned fule of myself an' lose my money. But I was so goshdarned smart that I thort I knowd everything. Now I begin to see that the old folks knew more'n I did, an', b'gosh, I guess even that won't kill 'em," he added, with many gestures and indications of disgust.

"But haven't you somebody at home in whom you can confide? Tell them that you have had a streak of bad luck and want help. There is nothing disgraceful about that. Thousands of men go into Wall street and other speculations and go broke."

Josh shook his head sadly.

"You will be well fixed when the old folks step out, so of course your credit must be good with those who know you. Say, Josh, isn't there some woman who wants a husband and—"

"Yes, b'gosh, there's Dolly Dimple, sweet as honey on me, an' she's got money; that is, if some other chap arn't got her afore this time," said he.

"Well, you can't do less than to try her."

"That's so. I'll write to Dolly this very day," said he, resolutely; and Dick thought he had scored a point.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE reader understands, of course, that the frightful picture that Dick Dingle had drawn of the perils of a showman in Mobile was done for an object, not because there was any truth in it any more than there

would have been had he been speaking of being stranded in any other city.

But he succeeded in frightening Josh Sheepshank into writing home for money, which he was farsighted enough to understand would be needed sooner or later. But at the same time he gave him a friendly "pointer" not to tell Colonel Suckerbait anything about it, for fear that he would squeeze it out of him in some way, and "drop it," as he had so many another dollar of the poor countryman's. On the contrary, he told him that if his friend should respond with cash, to keep a close grip on it for an emergency.

And yet Mobile did not prove to be a bad place after all. There was, it so happened, a dearth of amusements just then, and the result was that the houses were good all the week, and Suckerbait was not only enabled to pay all his expenses, but to leave the city with flying colors, and a few hundred dollars in the treasury.

This, he claimed, proved that his judgment was good, and he confidently predicted that they would be able to pay all back salaries and have a few thousands ahead before reaching New Orleans.

And the old showman and humbug had the faculty of making his company believe this, notwithstanding they knew him so well; and once more there was a smile on the New York Combination.

Even Josh was talked into a feeling of confidence and security again, in spite of the fact that he had been deceived so often; and in place of his late woe-begone look, he showed something like his old broad grin once more. But at the same time he adhered to Dick's advice, resolving to say nothing to Suckerbait, even if Dolly Dimple did respond with money to assist him. Yes, he had begun to learn to keep certain things from his partner, who had skinned him so badly.

But during their stay in Mobile, Josh gave that saloon where he had had so many sensational experiences a wide berth, fully convinced that social luck was somehow against him, and that he had better take no chances, although he never tumbled to the racket that he had been the victim of. Others were caught, but they broke away and fell on it, but Josh—never.

From Mobile they went to Montgomery, the capital, where they hoped to renew their good luck, and where, also, Josh had directed Dolly Dimple to address him, and, to tell the truth, he was anxious to hear from her, and see how she felt toward him.

Strange as it may appear, Dolly Dimple was very much in love with uncouth Josh Sheepshank. They had been school-mates, and she was regarded as much better-looking than he.

But as Josh grew older, and began to realize that he would be a rich man some day, he took on airs, and looked for something higher than Dolly, greatly to her sorrow; and when, by the death of his grandfather, he inherited ten or twelve thousand dollars in cash, he not only scorned poor Dolly all the more, but his bucolic life as well. He longed to get into the great active world of which he had read so much, and become a Jay Gould or a Jim Fisk. He scorned the farm and the lowing cattle. He wanted to become a big gun in the world.

The reader knows how he succeeded.

But Josh had been gone from the homestead but a few weeks before poor Dolly Dimple fell heirless to some twenty thousand dollars by the death of a relative—of which his parents had informed him—and she at once became one of the most attractive girls in the county. The young farmers, who had scarcely noticed her before, were now charmed with her. They had never noticed it before, but now they saw that Dolly Dimple was positively handsome. Her "figure" had changed so!

But Dolly was a sensible girl, and saw at once why she was so much more sought after than before, and she in turn took on airs, and gave these butterflies of the sunshine the cold shake.

There was only one man she wanted, and that was Joshua Sheepshank. But now that she was of quite as much importance in the world, financially, as he was, and, as he had slighted her, she resolved on giving him some of his own medicine if she ever had a chance.

Thus matters stood at this time.

The great New York Combination took possession of Montgomery with high hopes and great expectations. But Josh found no letter there for him from Dolly Dimple, and this made him feel a trifle sick.

Could it be possible that she had given him the cold shoulder—paid him off in his own coin?

It certainly looked like it.

But he wouldn't have cared so much if he had not written and told her of his condition, which, of course, gave her clearly to understand that he had lost all his money, and, now that she was in possession of the secret, everybody in all the neighborhood would know of it. Yes, he was sick.

He had heretofore held himself above her because he had money, and she had none, and now it looked very much as though the tables had been turned, and she was holding herself as much too good for him in his poverty.

"It serves me right," he muttered. "In fact, anybody serves me right, for I have been a gosh-durned fool all my life. Dolly Dimple is too durned good for me anyhow, an' I guess she knows it by this time. If I'd a married her an' settled down on the farm, as I oughter have done, I'd a had my ten thousand dollars, an' with her twenty, an' the whole farm bimeby, I should have been durned well fixed. Now, where am I? A thousand miles from anywhere, an' dead bust. Durn the show business, anyhow, an' once I get out of it, I hope to be kicked to death by grasshoppers if I ever have anything to do with it agin, by thunder!"

Dick Dingle was a trifle disappointed at the result of his stratagem, but he had not yet given up hope, for there might be various causes of delay on her part, and as they remained three days longer yet in Montgomery, he felt certain that Josh would yet get a letter.

Business at Montgomery was none of the best, and there was a very grim likelihood that they would be obliged to draw on the little reserve before quitting town out of debt, instead of adding more to it; and again the sky, that had been clearing, began to be overcast again, and every member of the combination heartily wished themselves back home again, and old Suckerbait at the bottom of the sea, while poor Josh felt worse than any of them.

Not a word from Dolly Dimple up to the time of leaving the city, and with a heavy heart, he left word with the postmaster to forward his letters, if any came, to the next stand.

Finally they worked their way as far as Jackson, Miss., where they arrived nearly in the same condition that they did in Mobile, and yet no word from Dolly, although the evidently discarded lover had taken great pains to leave word at each place to have his letters forwarded.

"I guess she has given me the icy shuffle," said Dick to him.

"Wal, b'gosh, it looks a little like it, although I can't blame her," replied Josh.

"Did you hint to her that you would do the right handsome and marry her?"

"No, by thunder, an' I'm alfred glad I didn't."

"Why so? It might have touched her on a tender toe, and made your chances better."

"No, sir. I'm glad I didn't. She's got her high laugh on me now quite hard enough, an' if I had hinted about marrying her, she'd have shown the letters all over the county."

"Well, what do you think is the matter?"

"Oh, I think she is up on her ear."

"What about?"

"Cos I shook her before I come away. Oh, she's a spunky piece, red-headed, but handsome as a picture. Besides, mother writes me that she has been traveling round considerable since I left, an' she got her windfall, and that she has seen or hear'n tell about my gal scrapes or somethin', an' I guess she has given me ther snow-flake flutter."

"Ah, Josh, if you had only taken my advice and left Angie and Kutejack alone when you must have seen that they cared nothing for you, how much better it would have been," sighed Dick.

"That's so, b'gosh, for if it hadn't been for Angie Vandevere I should never have gone in with this old skin, Suckerbait. But she looked and talked so lovingly, an' seemed to like to have me make love to her, that I got crazy."

"Well, how much have you made out of it?"

"Dick, I'll tell you. All I ever made was one kiss. Only think of it! ten thousand dollars for one kiss an' several gobs of taffy," said Josh, and he laughed somewhat sickly.

"Well, but you have had lots of experience."

"Yes, by thunder! I should smile if I hadn't."

"And that is worth something, you know."

"Yes; but if I had stayed to him, and not made a durned jackass of myself, I shouldn't have needed ther durned experience, b'gosh!"

"Oh, well, it is all in a life-time, Josh."

"Yes, when a feller puts it in himself. But, I say, what do you think of this place?"

"Not much. Jackson never was a good show town, and I'm afraid we sha'n't lug much wampum out of it," replied Dick, sadly.

"Gosh darn ther luck!"

"But we may catch on further up the river, and manage to reach the direct line East again."

"Thunder! how homesick I am!" said Josh.

"Oh, brace up, and make the best of it."

"But that ain't much. I'm getting seedy as a tramp, and want some new clothes."

"Well, we are all in the same box."

"Yes, but that don't make it any better."

"Think of the ladies, how they brace up."

"Yes, for they know they'll be taken care of somehow, while we're liable to get taken in an' locked up for debt. Oh, I wish I was at hum! I'd never leave it agin, I wouldn't, by ther great roarin' Jericho!"

"Would you feel better if you had new togs?"

"Wal, yes; a trifle."

"Well, why don't you wrestle with yourself?"

"Rassle? What do you mean, Dick?" Josh asked, looking at him with big eyes.

"Why, take a fall out of yourself."

"Don't understand," said Josh, taking his head.

"If a mountain fell on you, would you tumble?"

"Wal, maybe so."

"Well, I think it would take the fall of a house, at all events. Don't you stag his nibs?"

"Who?"

"The old man," said he, motioning with his head toward Colonel Suckerbait.

"What about him?"

"Hook your lamps on those new togs."

"That's so. Wonder how he got 'em?"

"You are not fly."

"Wal, I guess so. What is it?"

"Tickets."

"Tickets?"

"Tickets."

"How?"

"Passes—complimentaries. Worked them off on a clothing-dealer."

"Thunder you say!" exclaimed Josh.

"Fact, dear boy. And why don't you catch on? You have just as much right to give out passes and complimentary tickets as he has. Now, just work the clothing-dealers in Jackson, and I'll bet you can get new togs."

"B'gosh, I'll du it!" said Josh, brightening.

"Of course. But don't give me away."

"Oh, no; that's all right, Dick, an' if I can work it, I'll get you a suit."

"Good enough! Just saunter around among them. Take a few window-bills and some tickets along as a blind, and you can work it."

"I'll try it, b'gosh!"

"Not to-day, though. Give us all a chance at a cash house to-night, and work it up for to-morrow. See?"

"All right," and with this they separated, Dick with a twinkle in his eye, and Josh with a grin as big as a full moon.

The first night at Jackson was not a big success, although Dick Dingle made a hit, as he almost always did, and the performance gave general satisfaction, and more than paid expenses.

Of course, there was no knowing what the second night would be, although Josh Sheepshank had made up his mind what a portion of it would be, if he could work his racket as he hoped to do.

And he didn't let it slip out of his mind, having rosined it with earnest reflection, and he could think of no better way than Dick had suggested.

So the next morning he took a pocketful of tickets, and some "window-bills," telling his partner, Colonel Suckerbait, that he was going around to make sure that the town was thoroughly billed.

"But you don't expect to use all those tickets, do you?" asked Suckerbait.

"Wal, maybe," replied Josh.

"Well, maybe you won't. The place has been thoroughly billed by Muff, and there have been tickets enough given away."

"Oh, wal, I am goin' round, and maybe I may find a place where a bill will du good," replied Josh.

"All right; but you won't find places enough to call for all those tickets."

"Wal, if I don't I can bring 'em back, I s'pose," and he walked resolutely away.

"What is that duffer up to, I wonder? Here, Muff, quietly follow Josh and see what he does with those bills and tickets."

"Yes, sah," replied the darkey, who had overheard the conversation between the partners.

"I half suspect that he is going to raise money on them and skip the gutter. I don't care how quickly he lights out, but if there is any money in those tickets, I want it dropped here."

"Yes, sah; an' I guess we all does," replied Muff, and then he walked out after Josh.

"Yes, I wish I could shake him, for I have got all his money, and after that he simply becomes a nuisance. I wish I could find another sucker like him, though. Business is bad, and of course one sucker can't last always."

Thus mused the man who had held out such glittering prospects to his victim only a few months before.

But let us follow Josh, as Muff is doing.

He had cast his eye around the day before, and found a clothing store where there was no show-bill in the window, and he concluded to try his luck there first.

This he did in the usual way, by asking permission to hang a bill in the window, and this being granted on condition of a ticket to the performance being given for the privilege.

This done, he began to price different suits of clothes, and as he certainly stood in need of one, the Hebrew dealer felt sure of a sale, and at once became attentive and polite. Finally Josh fixed upon one of showy check and pattern, the price of which was twenty dollars. The cloth and make were good, but the pattern unsalable, and this was what accounted for its cheapness.

Josh challenged him to exchange the suit for tickets to the show.

Now it so happened that the wife of that Israelitish clothing-dealer was having a birthday, and he had been trying to think all the morning what he could do to celebrate it.

Eureka! He had found it.

A theater party! Proper caper always.

And so a bargain was struck, Josh giving him twenty-five dollars' worth of tickets for the suit.

After the exchange was made, Josh got into his new suit, while the old ones were bundled up to be taken away with him.

Josh was delighted, and so was Abraham Isaacs, for he concluded that he could take a large party to the theater, and at the same time sell suits enough for cash to get back the cost of the suit.

But Josh concluded that his old suit was scarcely worth taking home, and so on his way to the hotel he gave it away to a tramp, and this made him still happier, for he loved to do good.

Meantime, Africanus Muff took in the whole business, and returned to report to Mr. Suckerbait.

"Oh, you ought to see him now!" he exclaimed, laughing and swinging his arms most comically.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Suckerbait.

"Oh, my! Oh, yes!" he chanted, and then started to dance.

"Well, what is it?"

"Togs—new togs!"

"What?"

"Oh, you oughten to ter see 'em! Reg'lar song-and-dance harness."

And Muff roared his laughter.

"Where did he get it?"

"Upen to de sto'."

"With tickets?" demanded Suckerbait.

"Yes, ob co'sel!"

"Confound that sucker!" growled Suckerbait. "Give me the address of the store; I'll fix him."

Muff did as requested, and he wrote to the clothing-dealer as follows:

"MANAGER'S OFFICE, GREAT N. Y. COMBINATION.
"SIR,—Having been informed that a vagrant member of this combination has bought a suit of clothes of you, paying for the same with tickets, this is to notify you that the transaction will not be recognized at this office, or the tickets considered good.

Respectfully,
COLONEL SUCKERBAIT, Manager."

Muff took this letter to the clothing-dealer, who read it and wanted blood, or his suit back again; and the darkey told him where he could be found.

Meanwhile, Josh was showing himself to his friends and the public generally, although he didn't intend to show himself to Suckerbait in his new harness, until

"But it is all a mistake," protested Josh.
"Yaw; bud id vos no mistake dot I have dem clothes back again, or I kill you tead, und have you put in der log-up right away. Peel!"
"But won't you listen?"
"No. Come out of 'em, or I have you arrested."
"But I can't do it here. Come to the theater and I will convince you that it is all right. Come."
"No, sir. Go in dot coal-yard und dake off dem clothes, or I shoot you tead, so help me Moses!"
"But—"
"Go in!" and Josh did so, thinking to get out of sight and have a chance to reason with the man.
"Peel 'em off!" shouted the enraged Jew, at the same time cocking his pistol ready for action.
"But, say—"
"Not a vord, or off goes your heat!"

he was and the story of the trade with the clothier, and the subsequent demanding of the suit back again at the nose of a revolver.

"Well," said the officer, "you had better send to your hotel and get another suit of clothes."

"Ah, there's where the gol-darnedest roughest part of the luck comes in," replied Josh.

"How so?"

"Wal, yu see I didn't have but one suit, an' arter I got into my new ones, I gave the other one to a tramp, an' here I am, next ter stark naked, b'gosh-ermighty!"

"Well, I must say that you are in hard luck, my dear sir," said the official, and yet he could not refrain from laughing at him.

"Unlucky! I'll bet I'm the unluckiest sucker that ever struck the town of Jackson. Everything goes



"I'll pay you for the clothes." "No, you vos a skin und a snide. Quick now!" Josh tried to plead, but he saw angry mischief in the Hebrew's eyes, and much preferring to be a live man without clothes, to a dead man with them, he retired into a shed in that coal-yard and peeled himself down to his underclothes.

after the tickets had been honored, and then, if he kicked, he resolved on asserting his authority.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Dick, as first one and another whirled him around to get a look at that stunning new harness. "You might have done it before just as well as not, and I'm glad to see you bracing up a little."

"Oh, I'm *thar*, sometimes," said he, proudly.

"Keep it up!" said Harry Pratt. "Wish you could work the same racket for me."

"Maybe I will, Harry; I've just learned the wrinkle."

"Oh, you'll be all right in time. But if old Suckerbait gets to playing with his hoofs, just you assert your authority. You own as much of the show as he does, and don't you let him bully you."

"Yu bet I won't," replied Josh; and feeling that he would like to show himself some more, he started out for a promenade.

Of course Dick and the others laughed, but at the same time they approved of what he had done, even if it did make him look like a song-and-dance man standing for inspection on Union Square.

But Josh's usual luck was after him. That dealer in ready-made clothing saw him, and confronted him with a big revolver.

"You vos a snide! Come out of dem clothes, or I plow your'n roof off!" said he, fiercely.

"What's the matter?" asked Josh.

"You vos a snide, un dem dickets is no goot."

"Yes, they are."

"Dot vos a lie, und I plow your'n brains about dot sdreet if you don't gise me up dem clothes right away."

"I'll pay you for the clothes."

"No, you vos a skin und a snide. Quick, now!"

Josh tried to plead, but he saw angry mischief in the Hebrew's eyes, and much preferring to be a live man without clothes, to a dead man with them, he retired into a shed in that coal-yard and peeled himself down to his underclothes. The incensed Shylock took his clothes and departed, leaving poor Josh standing there in what little he had left.

Oh, where was that tramp!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE was poor Josh Sheepshank left there in the old coal-yard, stripped to his under-clothing, boots and hat, while the Jew of whom he had purchased his new suit in exchange for twenty-five dollars' worth of tickets had made him get out of it at the muzzle of a revolver.

Several boys were looking over the fence of the yard, and laughing at the unfortunate man, just as though he wasn't miserable enough already.

He was completely dazed when the man who had charge of the place came in with an officer and had him arrested.

Indeed, he was too much broken up to make any resistance or explanation. They took him for a crazy man, and he suffered himself to be led through the street to the police station, followed by a hooting crowd.

He seemed more heart-broken than crazy.

The captain questioned him, and after he had succeeded in pulling himself together a little, he told who

wrong with me. I'm a sort of lost sheep in the mountain. But, I say, can't I make that Sheeney give up those clothes?"

"No. According to law, they were his property until paid for, and he had the right to take them wherever he found them."

"Thunder!"

"Yes. He acted like a ruffian, and he is one, but he has the law on his side."

"While I've got nothing on my side, or on my back, either, b'gosh," said Josh, sadly.

"Perhaps some of the other members of the company will lend you a suit."

"What, an' go naked themselves? We're all in light marching order, squire."

The captain laughed, and led him into a back room, where, going to a closet, he pulled out several odds and ends of clothing, the most of it cast off by the officers. After trying awhile, they found an old suit, and Josh got into it.

True, it wasn't very new or stylish, but it was much better than no suit at all.

"There, that will at least protect you until you can do better," said the captain.

"That's so, squire. Much obliged. Whenever you think of me, think of the darnedest unlucky cuss that ever lived," and he walked away.

Josh Sheepshank never was a very handsome man, but in this picked-up suit he was further than ever from being a beauty. He started to go to the theater to see Suckerbait, for, by hook or crook, he was bound to have a new suit of clothes.

He walked along, muttering to himself regarding

the streak of luck that was pursuing him, for he had become so disgusted by this time that he wished heartily that he was dead.

"Gosh-darned if I don't think ther best-thing I can do is to shute myself full of holes. I'm gettin' wuss an' wuss all ther time. Trainin' an' experience might du some people good, but, b'gosh, I seem to grow greener an' greener all the time, an' have wuss luck. I'd run away and quit this roaming life, if I warn't afraid somethin' wuss would happen to me. Look at me," he added, catching a reflection of himself in a big show-window of a store. "Wal, isn't that a harness! What will the boys say?"

This he asked himself while his eyes rested upon the yellow-striped trousers that he had on. They were old, but still very loud.

Then he continued his way.

But, as he did so, one person of the many whose eyes were attracted by his picked-up suit stopped and took a closer look.

She was an old colored woman, a strong, hearty old girl who looked mussy.

She turned and followed him.

"Shoo ter you, boss!" she called to him.

Josh turned to her.

"Whar you get dem trouser?" she asked, stooping down and looking at them, without, however, looking him in the face.

"What business is that of yourn?" demanded Josh turning away.

"Whar you get dem trouser, I tole you?" she demanded, following him up.

"None of yure darned business. Clear out!"

"Look out fo' me, white man—I see bad."

"Yes, gol-darned bad," muttered Josh, but without halting at her request.

"Say you, I bet you steal dem trouserloons," she called, loud enough to attract even more attention than she had already done.

"Wal, I didn't steal 'em from you, at all events."

Dar war nebber but one par ob trouserloons like dem, an' my ole man wore 'em afore he died," said she, still following him.

"Yu go to thunder!"

"I go fo' a policeman an' yank you in fo' a suspicious character, if you don't tell me whar you got dem trouserloons. I knows 'em fast-rate, for I made 'em myself. Whar you get 'em?"

"Bah!" was Josh's only reply.

But this only made matters worse. The old girl felt certain that she had the law on her side, and that Josh had her dead husband's trousers on him, and she couldn't endure it.

So she reached out and caught him by the collar of his coat, yanking him to a stand-still and right about face.

"Lemme be, yu darned old nigger wench!" he cried, at the same time trying to free himself from her grasp.

"Whar you get dem trouserloons?"

"None of yure darned business. Lemme go or I'll smash you on the nose."

"Oh, you will, hey?" and she just drew off and "pasted" Josh just where he had threatened to paste her.

Then he yelled for the police.

Then she hit him again and yelled police herself, and a crowd of citizens soon gathered.

"Smash me in de nose, will you?" and she was trying to get in some more of her handiwork, when a policeman rushed upon the scene.

"Took him in, hossifer, took him in," she cried.

"What for?" asked the officer.

"Nebber you mind what fo'. You know me, and I prefer a charge ag'in him fo' shuah."

"All right. I shall have to take you in," said the cop, seizing Josh by the arm.

"What for—I ain't done nothin'," he protested.

"Never mind. Come to the station-house," and, in spite of his protests, poor Josh was marched back to the station-house from whence he had so lately come, followed by a curious crowd composed of all colors and conditions.

Once more he was placed before the astonished captain as a prisoner.

"What's the matter now?" he asked.

"Say, squire, I want satisfaction," said Josh.

"I gib you satisfaction. Say, cap'n, see dem trouserloons?" asked the irate old wench, pointing to them. "Dar nebber was such a kind afo' but one, an' dat I wove an' made myself for poo' Joe, as you knows berry well."

"Yes, I guess that is so, Nancy," mused the captain, remembering that they had formerly belonged to the old feller who had acted under him many years, and had died in harness, although he had left this old pair of trousers behind in the cast-off clothing closet. "But I gave them to him just now, knowing that Joe would never want them again," he added.

"But I want 'em. Dey is my property, an' I won't gee no lazy white tramp goin' round wid dem cius on dat I make fo' poo' ole dead Joe wid my own hands. No, sah. I want dem cius."

"All right. Give them to her, and I'll try to find you another pair," said the captain.

Josh followed him into the back room again, and, after hunting for some time, another pair, not so conspicuous, were found, and Josh got into them, while the others were turned over to the old girl, and Josh once more set at liberty.

"Wal, what did I tell yu, 'squire?" he asked, when the crowd had departed.

"You said you were a very unlucky cuss, and I guess you are right."

"Right! Right to a dot. There never was such an unlucky gump as I am. I sawn tu man, I b'lieve that if I should attempt to shoot my head off that ther darned pistol would bust an' blow my hand tu pieces, instead of duin' as any other pistol would, b'gosh!"

Luck has been agin me ever since I war born, an' I wish I war dead."

"Oh, brace up, man, brace up!" said the captain.

"Brace up? I'd be sure tu bust somethin' if I did, b'gosh!" he moaned.

"Oh, I guess not. Don't lose your grip."

"Never had any tu lose, b'gosh. No, if I war sure of makin' a clean job of it, I'd go an' jump into the river. But somebody 'd be sure tu yank me out, an' I'd get my duckin' an' a dose of rheumatism 'all for nothin', an' maybe they'd want me tu pay 'em for it, an' then lick thunder out of me 'cos I couldn't du it."

The captain laughed.

"No, there aren't no luck for me, an' I'd be a darn sight better off if I war dead," said he, taking a desponding step toward the door.

"Now, hold on. If you threaten suicide I shall be obliged to arrest you anyway."

"What?" exclaimed Josh.

"It is against the law."

"Thunder! A man can't even kill himself here, can he?" demanded Josh.

"No, sir; there is a law against it. You see, it costs the city a great deal to box a stiff, hold an inquest, and then plant him, so there is a law against committing suicide, or threatening to do it."

"There you are! Don't yu see what an unlucky steer I am? Tu unlucky to live, an' liable tu be arrested for wishin' myself dead."

"Oh, you don't want to die just now. Go to the theater and see your friends, and I will be there this evening to see you act."

"Ther boys'll make all sorts of fun of me."

"Why so?" asked the captain.

"Cos they seen me with that new suit on, an' they'll want tu know where it is. Don't yu see how darned unlucky I am? What shall I tell 'em?"

"Why, say you were waylaid and robbed of them, and that the captain of the police gave you these clothes?"

"Yes; but I'll bet a dollar some of 'em has hearn 'bout that old nigger wench afore this time," said he, mournfully.

"Oh, no, I guess not."

"But you don't know my blarsted luck. I had a girl dead sweet on me onct, but I shook her because I had more money than she had. Now she is rich and I am poor, she gives me the shake."

"Well, that serves you right."

"I s'pose it does, squire—I s'pose it does. Yes, I s'pose everything serves me right. I'd no business tu be born, b'goshermighty."

"Yes, I dare say it would have been money in your pocket if you had not been."

"Guess it would, b'gosh."

"Well, I cannot bother with you any longer now. But I shouldn't be surprised to see you brought back here in half an hour," said the captain, laughing.

"Wal, b'gosh, if yu du, it will be my lifeless body," said Josh, fiercely.

"Careful, there! No threats of that kind."

"I arn't a threatenin', squire. I didn't say as how I should kill myself, but ther way that luck is runnin' me tu-day, I reckon I stand as good a chance of gettin' killed as anything else."

"Well, take care of yourself," replied the captain, waving him away.

"Take care of myself! Guess I shall have tu get out of the show business tu du it," growled Josh, as he went from the station-house.

Joshua Sheepshank certainly was not in very good luck that day. He was certainly one of the most unlucky fellows in the world, but, like most other men, he was more unlucky on some days than others.

So he sadly made his way to the theater, in the hope of finding Colonel Suckerbait and getting at least a little sympathy, if no consolation, out of him.

But the colonel had skipped somewhere.

Dick Dingle and several others were there, but were puzzled what to make of him.

They had heard nothing of what had befallen him, but didn't understand the strange suit.

"Why, Josh, how is it?" asked Dick, whirling him around and looking him over.

"Where are those new togs?" asked Harry Pratt.

"What! Divorced so soon?" asked Dunellen; and, in truth, they were all much amazed.

"How is it, Josh?"

"Oh, nothin' much—only I swapped, that's all," said Josh, with a far-off look.

"Swapped! Why, this is worse than your other old suit. What the blazes did you want to swap for, after working so hard to get it?"

"Oh, bosh! You know," said he; but he really didn't appear to have much interest in the conversation.

"Oh, I see," said Pratt. "Great financial brain. Gets the togs for tickets, and then sells out for cash. Josh knows how to turn an honest penny."

"Well, I should say so. But you had better get into your old clothes again, for these look like the deuce, and you can never wear them on the stage to-night," said Dick.

"I gave 'em tu a tramp; an' as for goin' on the stage, I don't care a darn if I never go on again in my life. B'gosh, I'm sick of it."

"Well, you'll make the people in front sick if you appear in that harness. What is the matter with you, Josh? Are you going off your base?"

"I don't know, an' I don't care where I am goin'," said he, and he walked sadly away.

"What the deuce has happened him?" each one of them asked of the other, as they looked after him.

"Something has happened about that new suit of clothes that he don't want to give away. But we must find out what it is," said Dick, and just then a policeman sauntered along.

They were standing in front of the theater, and the officer, who was wearing a grin, stopped.

"That was a great snap, wasn't it?" he asked, and when they mildly asked to what particular snap he alluded, he proceeded to tell them all about Josh's trials in connection with that suit.

Then there were about a dozen laughs all blended into one, and big enough to attract a crowd.

They understood it all now, and although they laughed they could not help pitying poor Josh, who seemed to be the very butt of misfortune.

"I tumble to the whole business now," said Dick, after they had laughed and talked awhile.

"What is it?" asked Pratt.

"I honestly put Josh up to buying the suit with tickets, for he had just as much right to do so, as old Suckerbait has. But I suppose Suckerbait tumbled to the racket, and told the clothier that he would not recognize the tickets at the door, and he got mad and frightened poor Josh out of the harness after he had given his old one away. I'll find out if Suckerbait did this, and if he did, I'll put up a job on him that will make him sicker than Josh is—poor fellow!"

"It will serve the old skin right."

"Of course it would. Fun is fun; but this skin game that he has played so long on Josh I am sick of," said Dick; and the others agreed to it.

In a few minutes Muff happened along.

He appeared to have been laughing so heartily and so long that his big mouth wouldn't shut. It was some time before they could get out of him what the matter was, although Dick suspected that it was all on account of what had happened to Josh Sheepshank; and finally, between his fits of wild laughter, he managed to tell them the whole particulars of the affair.

"Oh, by golly, neber hab so much fun—"

"Since you tried to play that trick on Josh with the wig-block, hey?" broke in Dick, and black Muff looked a trifle more serious all of a sudden, as he remembered the racket spoken of. "Muff, you had no business to put your oar in, anyhow," added he.

"But de boss tole me," said he.

"Which boss?"

"Why, Colonel Suckerbait, to be shuah."

"Now, Muff, don't you make yourself so much in need of salt. Josh is just as much your boss as Suckerbait is, and you have no business to work for one to the detriment of the other. In fact, the law could be taken on you for it. Now go and make good with Josh, or take the consequences," said he, with great earnestness.

"What I do?" asked Muff.

"I don't care what you do. You must look out for yourself. I'm only giving you this for a pointer. But you had better square yourself with Josh."

Muff walked in one direction, and Dick and Harry Pratt in another.

Dick's better nature was touched, and he was bound to see Josh and see if he couldn't help him out of his snap.

They finally found him down on the levee, looking sadly into the water, as though wishing that the law didn't prevent his drowning himself.

Dick was indignant, and after speaking to the victim cheerfully, he assured him that he would work for him until he got square; and so, at his suggestion, all three of them went back to the Hebrew clothier of whom Josh had bought the suit.

As they entered the store the Jew placed his hand on his pistol-pocket, evidently expecting that Josh had returned with some friends for the purpose of revenge, and perhaps of cleaning him out.

But Dick was equal to the situation.

"N. M.," said he, approaching the Israelite.

"What's that?" he demanded, quickly.

"No muss."

"Well, vot you want, anyhow?"

"Want those tickets back, that's all."

"Dot vos all right. Dey vos no goot to me."

And he produced them, together with the letter that Suckerbait had written him.

Dick glanced at it.

"I thought so. My dear fellow-mortal, do you know that you have laid yourself liable to imprisonment and damages?" he asked, earnestly.

"No. How?"

"Well, to begin with, this exchange of tickets for a suit of clothes was strictly legitimate. This man has as much to do with the show as the writer of this letter has, as he told you at the time. This man is a conspirator," he added, holding up the letter, "and you have laid yourself liable by playing into his hands, thereby causing great mental and bodily suffering to my client."

"Vos you a lawyer?" asked the astonished Jew.

"Most undoubtedly. If the transaction had been fraudulent, clearly proven, you had a right to get back your goods; but in this case it was perfectly legitimate, and you have not only made yourself liable to money damages to a large amount, but also to a suit for assault and false imprisonment, which resulted from your conduct toward him."

"Farder Abraham! Is dot so?"

"Without a question."

"But dot ledder?"

"It is simply the work of a conspirator, and he has made you his unconscious accomplice in a great wrong. I simply want the tickets and this letter, in order to prove my case," he added, turning to go.

"But, mine friend," said the alarmed Jew.

"Well?" and Dick turned upon him calmly.

He was doing some fine acting now.

"You see I vos misdaken."

"Perhaps so, but we all have to pay for our mistakes in this world," replied Dick, turning again.

"I vos villing to avoid more droubles."

"That is all very well to say, after you have abused my client as you have. But what will you do, for we are not overanxious to encounter the law's delay?"

"I give him der clothes, und say noddings," said he

preparing to wrap up the goods, and it was evident that he was really frightened.

Dick turned and consulted Josh, who was as much astonished as the Hebrew was, but before he had finished, the clothier handed him the bundle.

"Now dot vos all right. I vos sorry dot I vos so haedy mit you, bud I thought I vos swindled."

"One moment, please," said Dick, waving him to stand back until he had finished his talk, and then after a little he said, aloud: "But perhaps under the circumstances, so long as he has made an apology, and your stay here is to be short, you had better take up with his offer."

"Yaw, mine frient, I vos very sorry," said that descendant of Abraham, again offering the clothes.

"All right, if you say so," growled Josh.

"Yes, I think it is the best way," and Josh took the

the tickets, and told him to stop any theater-party from going in who he was not personally sure had bought tickets at the box-office, in this way thinking to thwart his bold partner.

But Dick Dingle was boss of that racket this time, and things were liable to work differently.

Dick placed those tickets just where he wanted them, and where he thought they would do the most good, and he had a perfect understanding with those to whom he presented them.

Suckerbait was on the lookout for a theater-party, and he lingered around the door until it was time for him to go behind and dress for his part without seeing anything that looked like one, although it struck him that there was a large number of "bill-board" tickets coming in.

But, as the house would be a paying one for all of that, he did not mind it, and so once more cautioning

convinced that quite a large amount of "paper" was coming in. But as this was not an unusual thing, and he had no means of knowing how much had been given out, he attended strictly to business, and asked no questions outside of that.

Suckerbait was very nervous, and as soon as he had dressed he kept his eye at the peep-hole in the curtain, so as to see what was going on in front.

There were no signs of disturbance, and the house was packed so that there seemed to be no possible room for the expected theater-party.

The musicians were rasping away at an overture, which succeeded in keeping the people partially quiet.

Finally he called:

"All to begin!" and seeing the characters in their proper places at the wings, he rang the first bell for the orchestra to wind up.



She reached out and caught him by the collar of his coat, yanking him to a stand-still and right about face. "Lemme be, yu darned old nigger wench!" he cried, at the same time trying to free himself from her grasp. "Whar you get dem trouserloons?"

bundle of clothes, and started slowly for the door. The Jew detained Dick.

"I vos very much obliged to you, mine frient, and if you vant some clothes, I sell 'em to you cheaper as any man in Jackson."

"Very well, I shall remember you," replied Dick, bowing haughtily, and following his "client."

Then that honeybugled Israelite went into the back room of his store and there kicked himself for at least half an hour.

"Now for old Suckerbait," said Dick.

"Dick, you are a genius," said Pratt.

"Gol darn my aunt's cat's hind leg, but you are a brick," added Josh, in his delight.

"Keep very quiet, and say nothing about the matter. Don't answer any questions," said Dick.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOSEPH SHEEPHANK made his appearance at the theater that night, clad in his new and much fought for suit of clothes, which he had finally recovered through the adroitness of Dick Dingle.

Colonel Suckerbait, after having thwarted the arrangement that Josh had made to get them in exchange for tickets, had kept out of his sight until it was time to open the box-office, which he was always sure to superintend.

But he caught on to Josh and those new togs, and yet, as Josh had been cautioned not to say anything about how he got them, he was on his guard.

Suckerbait tumbled, or thought he did, and, without saying a word, he spoke to the man who took

the ticket-taker to be on his guard, he retired behind the scenes.

There he found the company all assembled and dressed for their parts, with Josh the center of attraction, on account of his new clothes.

He frowned upon him as he passed to his dressing-room, but said nothing, although he called Muff soon afterward.

"Say, Muff, where did he get those clothes?" he demanded, when they were alone.

"I don't know, sah!" replied Muff.

"Don't know!"

"No, sah, but dey am de same ones dat he buy ob de Jew for tickets, or some jus' like 'em."

"The deuce they are!" exclaimed Suckerbait, for it will be remembered that he had not seen the "harness" at the time that Muff saw it first.

"Yes, sah."

"Then there'll be a nice row at the door."

"Why so, sah?"

"Because I have left orders to stop any theater-party who do not buy their tickets at the box-office. Confound that sheepshanked sucker. He is worse than a sore toe, and ten to one this will be the means of getting us into trouble here. Oh, I wish I was clear of him. I'll put up some sort of a job on him to get him arrested, so that we can skip out, and leave him behind to do the best he can. He's a perfect nuisance."

Meanwhile, the ticket-taker in front was on the lookout for a theater-party who should try to get in on paper not bought at the box-office.

No such party presented itself, and yet the man was

At the second bell, up went the curtain on Act I, Scene, 1 of "The Bride."

Colonel Suckerbait, as "the cruel parent," strode upon the stage, looking indeed like the tyrant capable of crushing love out of his daughter, or almost anything else—even a mule.

The audience had nestled into silence.

It was both funny and startling, for, before he had a chance to speak, there came from the colored gallery, in chorus:

"Hi, hi, hi!"

Everybody looked up.

Then, from the lower part of the house, there came an answering startler, also in chorus:

"Ah, ah, ah! How-are-you-old-Suckerbait!"

To say that the great "actor-author," as he was known on the bills, was taken aback, would be putting it as light as loading a camel with a straw.

He stopped in the center of the stage, and looked first at the gallery, and then at the body of the house.

An instant later the whole assemblage broke out into loud shouts of laughter, and the great man was completely nonplused.

Dick Dingle and some others stood at the wings laughing, but he heeded them not; he was too much broken up.

Finally somebody in the gallery shouted:

"Let her go, boss!" which aroused him, and he began the opening speech of the play.

The audience quieted right down to hear it. Indeed, one could scarcely believe that the people had not been quiet all the while, and yet he nearly missed his lines because of his excitement.

To him came on, as the second character to appear upon the scene, Dick Dingle, and he was received with much applause, a thing hardly to be accounted for, since this was his first appearance before the people of Jackson, although it would have been nothing strange on a second, third, or fourth night.

Suckerbait wondered, but he managed to go on with the dialogue, and after finishing it for that scene, he walked off, leaving the stage to Dick, who had a short solo speech, after which Josh Sheepshank, or "Malcolm Darnley," his stage name, as will be remembered, came on.

He was also received with thunders of applause, which also astonished Suckerbait, as it was only a minor part, and had never been noticed before.

As a part of Dick's "business" in the play, he has to advance to meet Josh and shake hands, and as he did so he gave him a whirl around; then turning to the people in front, he asked:

"How is that for new?"

Now, there were several dozen in front who knew more or less about Josh's sensational experience in obtaining the suit, and those who did not could but laugh at the "loudness" of it.

Just then from the colored gallery came in chorus, as before:

"Hi, hi, hi!"

Then from somewhere in the body of the house:

"Ah, ah, ah! How-are-you-Josh?"

Josh was equal to the emergency.

"I'm purty well, much obliged to yu. How be yu 'n the folks?"

This brought down the house again, and, with anybody less adept than Dick Dingle on the stage at the time, the whole thing would have fallen into confusion, but he could play two or three parts at the same time.

Old Suckerbait was in a terrible way, and other members of the company looked on from the wings, all but one or two of them wondering what it all meant, and even those who did know wondering where it would all end.

But Dick soon began in a most natural way on the dialogue, and Josh was familiar enough with it and used enough to him by this time to be able to play second to him in any of his guises.

Finally, after going through with enough of the dialogue to inform the audience as to the nature of the parts both he and Josh had to play, he suddenly paused, and looked at him.

"Say, where did you unite yourself to those wraps?"

Then there was another laugh, and Josh blushed.

Dick was catching right on, as usual, with the audience by his brilliant, dashing style, and they didn't know but that the dialogue of the play was being adhered to, although there were several who knew better, and others who suspected it. But, at all events, it was good enough, and all were interested, while Suckerbait stood by the prompt-box, with clenched fists, glaring at them.

"Why, I bought 'em, to be sure," replied Josh, and it sounded just like regular dialogue.

"Let me take another look," said Dick, and he whirled him around again. "Solomon Isaacs?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," replied Dick, laughing in his earnest, good-natured way, that set the whole audience doing the same thing.

Dick's laugh was always very catching.

Josh grinned, although he looked foolish.

"Well, that's all right. You look almost as well as the boss does. But I say?"

"What?"

"Isn't it a trifle vociferous?" And again he inspected the suit.

"A what?"

"A bit ejaculative."

"Gosh-darn if I get on!" muttered Josh, and nothing could have been more natural under the circumstances than the dialogue was, only it was mostly new to the other members of the combination, and wholly exasperating to Suckerbait.

"Well, isn't it somewhat oracularly obtrusive upon one of the five senses?"

"Git out! Git down a few rungs, an' give it to us in English," said Josh.

"Non comprehendevons?"

"Wal, I guess so."

"Well, then, to come right down to the United States language, isn't your suit, that you purchased from that eminent Christian, Solomon Isaacs, rather loud?"

"Wal," said Josh, looking at himself the best he could without a full-length mirror, "it isn't a mournin' suit exactly," and this wrought another laugh not belonging to the play.

"Well, I don't know about that. I think I should be in mourning if I had to wear it, and I guess you would be in mourning if you didn't have it."

"B'gosh, I believe yer story."

Then they went on with the dialogue, Dick getting in half a dozen or more local hits, as was his wont, until the cue was reached at the end of the scene, and they went off, leaving the audience convulsed with laughter.

Suckerbait blew the whistle for the scene-shifters, and other characters claimed the public eye.

"What in thunder does this mean, Dick?" demanded Colonel Suckerbait, as the joker came off on the "prompt side," and the next scene was going.

"What?" asked Dick, looking honest.

"Oh, you know very well what I mean."

"The deuce I do!"

"Yes, I'll be sworn you do."

"About what?"

"Look here Dick Dingle, this is played."

"What?"

"This nonsense."

"What nonsense?"

"Oh, give me a rest. You tire me, Dick."

"Very sorry."

"Oh, yes; not the slightest doubt of it."

"And yet I fail to catch on."

"Now, you know you lie, Dick. What is the meaning of that new suit of clothes?"

"Why, they are new ones."

"But where did he get them?"

"Bought them, of course."

"What with?"

"Money, of course. I don't see anything so very strange about that. He is an equal partner in the business, and I don't see why he shouldn't have new clothes, and one-half of all the luxuries consequent upon the money-invested and the money made. He has sunk ten thousand dollars."

"And I—"

"Haven't even diluted your gall," replied Dick, walking away.

"Look here, Dick Dingle!" called Suckerbait, who was amazed at his impertinence.

Dick turned.

"Who put up this job?"

"What one?"

"Why, that one they worked on me."

"I give it up," and he turned again to go.

"Dick, you'll get bounced yet," cried the old fraud, with much manifested anger.

"Good! Make it as soon as you take money enough to pay me my back salary," said Dick, and this made Suckerbait tired, for he knew he could never get along without him.

But he made no reply, and Dick walked to the other side of the stage, behind the flats that were on, so as to be ready for the next scene.

Meantime, Josh had been receiving the congratulations of those who happened to be on the same side of the stage, for he had certainly, in connection with Dick Dingle, made the hit of the evening thus far.

As for Suckerbait, he never felt quite so sick in his life. He dreaded to go upon the stage again, for he felt certain that the audience knew more than it ought to of his business, and perhaps of his character. As for Dick Dingle, he was getting altogether too fresh, even to the point of impudence. The young fellow, who had at first been his onlooker, had now grown to be the principal member of the combination, and he knew that without him he could not keep on the road a single week longer. He had expected to become the great male attraction himself, but he had to own in his own heart that he didn't amount to a handful of shucks alongside of the youngster, who made friends with everybody, and who was always as bright as a new gold piece.

But Dick had evidently got back on him of late, probably because he had learned his own worth and strength, and had taken up for Josh Sheepshank, the man he had taken in and ruined financially.

And he was too old a bird not to know that this racket had in some way been started by Dick, and that Josh had managed in some way to get his new suit through him.

Indeed, he could have stood that, for he was not so obtuse as not to see the justice of it, but he dreaded "the laugh" which he felt certain was bound to be his if Dick was at the bottom of it.

But he also saw that it was a reaction—that it was in favor of Josh Sheepshank, whom he had used so meanly, and, like the shallow rascal that he was, he resolved to put up some sort of a job that would result in getting rid of him.

He was a simple nonentity now that his money was gone. The part he played in the piece could be "doubled," and played by some other member of the company, and so he resolved to get clear of him by foul means or fair, either by making him sick enough to run away of his own accord, or have him worked into some trap whereby he could be arrested and left behind, without seeming to be to blame himself.

But while he was thus cogitating, it came time for him to go on the stage again, as "the cruel parent."

And the moment he showed himself there came again from the colored gallery:

"Hi, hi, hi!" in chorus.

Then from the body of the house, as before:

"Ah, ah, ah! How-are-you-old-Suckerbait?"

and then, of course, the audience laughed.

Oh, it was unmistakably a put-up job on him, but he took as little notice of them as possible, and went on with his part.

But, oh! how mad he was!

And yet he knew that Josh Sheepshank could never work up such a snap, and also that there was but one person connected with the combination, and that was Dick Dingle.

But, for all that, he felt certain that Dick would never have undertaken it but for Josh, and as he could do without Josh much better than he could without Dick, he resolved on putting the blame on Josh, and to get rid of him as speedily as possible. He was a squeezed lemon, anyhow, without even having the worth of the rind or peel about him.

And so the play went on until its finish, but every time either Suckerbait or Sheepshank appeared upon the stage, that same cry was indulged in.

Josh didn't mind it, but Suckerbait fairly frothed at the mouth, so mad was he.

Then came the afterpiece, "The Widow's Victim," in which, by this time, Dick Dingle had become so proficient in the part of Jeremy Clip, that it was acknowledged that he had no superiors, however long upon the stage. Some of the best actors of the day had appeared in Jackson in that part, but those who had seen them all acknowledged Dick to be the boss.

Altogether, the performance gave first-rate satisfaction, and the prospect of a good house the next night

was first rate. Indeed, had it not been for the laugh that Suckerbait had endured, he would have been one of the most cheerful members of the combination.

But his reception made him weary, and his mind was made up to get rid of Josh Sheepshank, and yet, how to do it was the question.

Still, he felt savage enough to resort to any method, and he would gladly have left Dick Dingle as well, had he not been so valuable a member of the troupe, for he felt certain that he had more or less to do with the racket that had been played on him.

Dick tumbled to Suckerbait's scheme. He knew very well that the concern could not keep on its legs much longer, and that it was only a question of time when the whole combination would be on its "uppers," and be counting railroad ties on their weary way toward home. And he understood that the old rascal wanted to drop Josh by the way, and that Josh would refuse to be dropped; therefore, it would be just like Suckerbait to put up some job on the poor countryman, never caring for the result.

Their last night at Jackson was a good one, the house being well filled, for by this time Dick had made himself a favorite feature of the show, as he usually did.

But, according to Suckerbait's figures, it was a poor house, scarcely paying expenses, and Dick understood, as he had long suspected, that the colonel was quietly stealing to feather his own nest, so that he would be able to return to New York when the final crash came, and let the others do the best they could.

Josh, of course, growled when Suckerbait told him that the most of the house was "paper," and then Suckerbait got up on his eyebrow.

"Josh, if you don't like it, the best thing you can do is to take your gripsack and light out," said he.

"But where's the money?" asked Josh.

"Echo answers 'where?' But I am tired of your growling. I am not to blame for bad business, and if you don't like it, you had better get out."

"Oh, yu be gol-darned. I'm going to stick to it til we get back to New York," replied Josh.

"Oh, you are, eh? How do you rate as a long-distance walker?" asked Suckerbait.

"I can keep up with yu, never fear."

"If you do, you are a good one," thought the colonel, and turning, he walked away.

"Yes, an' if ever I du get to New York I'll show yu up, old man, an' don't forget it," said Josh.

The following morning they were to start for Vicksburg, and, of course, as usual, everybody was busy packing up, for the life of a strolling player is one of the worst in the world, and be they ever so successful, they are little better than homeless vagabonds—always on the go, and seldom in a place like home.

Remember the truth of this, boys, if you ever are so unfortunate as to get stage-struck.

The life seems a pleasant one when viewed behind the footlights upon the stage, but they are like slaves, who dress and gild themselves and play their parts, oftentimes with aching hearts.

But to return to narration.

Josh Sheepshank's trunk stood in his room unlocked, as did Dick Dingle's, they occupying a room together.

It was yet two hours before train-time.

Dick had not risen yet, for he was up late the night before, and loved his bed anyway; but Josh was up and away with Muff helping to get the traps to the station.

Colonel Suckerbait stole softly into the room, but not so softly that Dick did not have an open eye for his ribs.

He had something in his hand.

Looking at Dick for an instant, and seeing that he was evidently asleep, he approached Josh's trunk on tiptoe, lifted the cover, glanced again at the bed where Dick lay, and then deposited the something that he had with him in the trunk, placing it carefully beneath some wearing apparel, after which he left the room silently.

After he had gone, Dick Dingle got up and took a look at what Suckerbait had placed in Josh Sheepshank's trunk, at the same time feeling certain that it was not money.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DICK DINGLE found that Colonel Suckerbait had placed a small artistic clock in Josh Sheepshank's trunk and covered it carefully up with clothing.

It was really a valuable time-keeper, as well as being a work of art, and Dick had seen it on the mantel of the general reception-room, where it was always greatly admired.

"Oh, the old rascal!" said Dick, as he held the little clock in his hands. "This is the meanest piece of business that I have ever known him to attempt yet. He has downed poor Josh, got all his money away from him, and now he wants to get rid of him by having him arrested for stealing. It is just about as mean as I thought he could be. But I think I'm in time for that train. I will copper his ace; I will turn a bottom trump on him and catch him out on his jack-pot."

Dick proceeded to dress himself, after which he took the clock and sought Colonel Suckerbait's room, where his trunk also stood unlocked.

He just placed the stolen article beneath the colonel's clothing and effects, after which he went down to breakfast—late, of course, and having it all to himself in the dining-room.

"Going to have poor Josh arrested for stealing, eh?" he mused, while waiting for his hash. "Skinned him out of his sugar, and going to give him the grand 'sour' now, eh? Well, we shall see, for it is rather a cold day when I get left."

Just then he commenced the Græco-Roman wrestling match with a cow beefsteak that had been placed before him. Dick was a good one, and he had tackled many a country steak, but this one downed him, and so he called for sausages on the half-shell.

Meantime Colonel Suckerbait had told the hotel clerk about the absence of the clock, and strongly intimated that it could probably be found in the trunk of Josh Sheepshank.

"Mind you," said he, "I have had much trouble with him on account of his kleptomaniacal propensities, and, between you and me, I do not propose to be bothered any more. I heard him say that he thought he would scoop that clock, and I strongly suspect that you will find it packed away in his trunk for future delivery."

The clerk was very indignant. The clock had been given to the landlord by one of his old and particular

"I suspected of stealing?" roared Suckerbait.

"Well, call it 'taking time by the forelock,' or whatever you like, but I must do my duty, and search your trunk," replied the officer.

"Certainly—of course. I am a law-abiding man, and shall not object to your doing so, only upon the grounds of the aspersion it casts on my character."

"Oh, that will be all right, undoubtedly. There has been a mistake made, evidently, and a sneak has stolen the clock. Nevertheless, I must do my duty."

"Certainly—of course."

"Which is your trunk, please?"

"That one," replied Suckerbait, proudly, pointing to a large zinc trunk among the others.

"Be good enough to open it."

"Certainly," and he proceeded to do so, while the company and quite a crowd of outsiders gathered around.

heartily wished herself at home, and out of a combination whose manager was a petty thief.

Josh Sheepshank was nearly as much astonished and broken up as was his faithless partner, but he followed him to the court, feeling very blue, not knowing, of course, that if it had not been for Dick, he would have been in Suckerbait's place.

The prisoner was placed to the bar, and the story of finding the stolen article in his trunk was told.

A look of recognition passed between the justice and Dick Dingle. The justice was a young man, but evidently understood himself.

"Now, Mr. Suckerbait, I regard you as one of the meanest men I ever knew, and were it not for your company, which is very much too good for you, I would send you to jail for three months. As it is, I simply fine you twenty-five dollars," said the justice. "And now, don't you lose any time in getting out of



Looking at Dick for an instant, and seeing that he was evidently asleep, he approached Josh's trunk on tip-toe, lifted the cover, glanced again at the bed where Dick lay, and then deposited the something that he had with him in the trunk.

friends, and he felt it incumbent upon him to make the thermometer rise suddenly in the immediate neighborhood of the thief.

It was by this time nearly the hour for the members of the troupe to take the boat for Vicksburg, and, of course, they were all on hand.

Finally, when they were all ready to start, and their trunks all stood in the vestibule of the hotel, a policeman appeared upon the scene and asked for Joshua Sheepshank.

"That's me, b'gosh. What do yu want?" asked Josh, coming to the front.

"I have a search-warrant commanding me to open your trunk to search for stolen property," replied the officer.

"Stolen thunder! What are yu doin' up for me?"

"Be kind enough to open your trunk for me, otherwise I shall be obliged to force it."

"All right," and Josh unlocked his trunk.

The officer went all through it, but found no clock, while Suckerbait stood by anxiously.

"It doesn't seem to be here," said the officer.

"In course it arn't," said Josh, indignantly.

"But I have another warrant here for the inspection of Mr. Suckerbait's trunk," said the officer.

Colonel Suckerbait started as though some one had hit him on the nose.

Everybody else looked surprised, with the possible exception of Dick Dingle.

"What in thunder do yon mean?" demanded the guilty manager, of the officer.

"Well, there has been a clock stolen from this hotel, and suspicion points to one of you two as the pur-joiner thereof."

The officer took out the tray of the trunk and then began to lift out the various articles of clothing.

He had not proceeded far before he came upon that clock and held it up to view.

Everybody started, but Suckerbait was paralyzed.

Could he believe his eyes? What had happened?

Had he, in his excitement, placed the stolen clock in his own trunk instead of Josh's?

He was all broken up in trying to account for it.

"So—so, you are the thief, are you?" asked the officer, turning to him.

Suckerbait's cheek deserted him for the first time in many years. He tried to speak, but his jaws wouldn't work, and his tongue was as dry as punk.

The members of the company looked at each other in surprise. Prospects must be very bad indeed when the manager had to resort to stealing in order to get along. And they were all sad.

"You will have to go along with me," said the officer, advancing toward him.

"I—I don't understand it at all. I—"

"Oh, well, come over to the police court and see if the justice understands it."

"It is all a mistake somehow."

"Well, perhaps you can convince his Honor that such is the case. Come."

"But I—"

"Come right along," said the officer, and, in spite of his protestations, he was marched away to court, followed by a crowd, of course, a portion of which was made up of the company.

As for the ladies of the combination, they retired to the parlor in shame and confusion, and each of them

Jackson, and don't try to play any more such mean games as this one, in which you yourself came to grief."

What did he mean?

This was decidedly rough on Suckerbait.

Yes, almost as rough as it would have been had the court sent him to prison, for the amount of his fine was what he had "cribbed" and stowed safely away for an emergency—such as the total and complete collapse of the concern, the members of which he intended to leave to shift for themselves, while he lit out for New York.

But there was no help for it, and so down he went for that "quiet, nest-egg," and ruefully laid it before the clerk of the court, who at once gave him credit for the amount, so that he could say with Othello:

"I have done the State some service, and they know it."

But what the judge had said rung in his ears and in his heart as he walked sullenly out of court, followed by his friends.

"And don't try to play any more such mean games as this one in which you yourself came to grief."

That was what the judge had said. But what the dickens did he mean by it?

Had he made a mistake and put his foot in it?

But how?

And as he walked along he tried to think out how it all came about.

Dick Dingle was abed in the same room that Josh Sheepshank occupied, but it did not seem possible that he was not asleep at the time when he placed the stolen clock in Josh's trunk. And yet, might not that incorrigible joker have been playing possum at

the time, and changed the clock from his intended victim's trunk to his own, with the before-mentioned results and disgraces?

But he felt that there would be no use in attempting to get at the truth of the matter, for the more it was stirred up, the worse the smell was; and he felt sick enough to let the matter drop as quickly and quietly as possible, and now the next thing to do was to get to Vicksburg.

This they had just about money enough to do, and if business proved bad there, it would be sure to strand them hopelessly.

So, naturally enough, it was not a very gay and festive party that went to Vicksburg on that occasion, for, besides being blue, they were disgusted with the conduct of Suckerbait, in being arrested for a common thief.

Well, they finally "struck" the city of the great siege, and had just money enough to make a deposit on the hall in which they were to play, and everything depended upon the result.

Suckerbait did not have money enough to bill the place properly, and things certainly did look very bluish for everybody. But they were all bent on doing their very best, of course.

They were advertised for three nights, but the first one made them sick.

The house wasn't half full, even with all the "paper" that Suckerbait had put out, and, in spite of all that Dick Dingle could do, the pieces dragged, and did not give the usual satisfaction; so that there remained a poor prospect for the next two nights.

Both Suckerbait and Josh were feeling very blue, and there was an imminent prospect of all hands going to the bad. Indeed, Dick Dingle had told Josh that very morning that he had better get iron soles put on his shoes, as there was little doubt but that he would need them.

"Gol darn my old aunt's cat's tail!" he was heard to exclaim several times during the day, and it was evident that there was heaps of trouble on the poor victim's mind.

The house on the second night was even worse than the first one was, and as there was no prospect for its being any better on the third, it was agreed that the combination was stranded, and that it had got to take chances on getting back to New York.

But, of course, the first thing to do under the circumstances was to make what provision they could for the ladies.

The poor creatures were quite as hard up as the men were, but their desire to reach home was quite as strong as that of their friends, and from them there was nothing but bitterness heaped upon the head of Colonel Suckerbait, the unlucky manager, the cause of all their woes and misfortunes.

But the milk had been spilled, and there was no use in crying about it. They had started out with a dash and a flourish of printers' ink, that had lasted as long as Josh Sheepshank's money lasted, and although they had been short ever since then, they could but admit that they enjoyed more advertising and notoriety than they ever had before, or might ever enjoy again, and on that account they felt as though they had not ought to be very high "kickers," although they blamed old Suckerbait.

But they were used to the life, and knew that desperate cases demanded desperate remedies; and so they got their jewelry together and pledged it for money enough to enable them to reach New York, leaving the male members of the combination to do the best they could, although they had, in fact, assisted them to the utmost of their poor abilities in getting out of the dreadful situation they were in.

But finally they got started, taking the boat for St. Louis, from which point they were to take the cars for the East. The parting between them and certain members of the company was quite affecting, although they were all down on Suckerbait. Even in their misery they excused Josh, knowing that he had been a victim from the very start, and that he, like the others would be obliged to leave his trunk at the hotel until some time in the sweet by-and-by.

They all went down to the boat together, and the

ladies were made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

"And I hope you will all get through and reach home without trouble, with the exception of Suckerbait," said Miss Vandevere, bitterly, as they were about to sail.

"Indeed, and so you place the blame all on me, do you?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Yes, for you are as bad a manager as you are an actor. Your piece is bad, and your management is bad, only in the line of taking in suckers. In that you are fine, and rightly named. We who knew you were fools for going out with you, for you never made a success of anything you have yet undertaken. You are a Jonah, and I hope you will never find another sucker or an artist who will be fool enough to go with you," said she, bitterly.

"You wrong me, Angie."

"No, that is impossible. A thief cannot be wronged."

This was a "corker," coming from the leading lady, especially as it was very evident that every member of the company shared in her estimate of him. But he had to swallow it.

In a few moments the ladies were on their way North, leaving the male members of that once promising New York combination hopelessly stranded, nearly fifteen hundred miles from home.

And they were the remnants of a very sad lot of artists, there not being a ten-dollar note between them, and the prospect of a very long walk before them.

Josh was very despondent, but Dick braced up in his usual hopeful, cheery way.

They went back to the hotel, and after extracting the valuables from their trunks (and they were very light) Dick led the way out upon the railroad, the ties of which they would probably have to count from there to Jersey City, unless they were fortunate enough to strike a friendly conductor or to catch a free ride.

Indeed, they were a sad, sad lot, as they set out on their long tramp. They had gone forth like rockets and were returning like sticks.

Josh was very indignant, and kept firing and growling at Suckerbait as they trudged along. He was blamed for the whole business by all of them, but Josh was, of course, especially sore.

"Gol darn yu're nasty plecter, where's my ten thousand dollars?" he growled, as they walked along.

"Oh, shut up—you make me tired!" said Suckerbait, not wishing to answer such a conundrum.

In fact, he had even more to think of than he cared for without answering Josh in any particular.

"Wal, I'll bet yu'll get more tired than I make yu afore yu strike New York. But if ever I reach there, I'll advertise yu as the meanest cuss that ever stole a clock; I will, b'gosh!"

Suckerbait made no reply, but continued to walk sullenly along, counting the railroad ties, as he had done before on more than one occasion.

Dick Dingle and Dunellen were a long ways in advance. In fact they combined first-rate pedestrian qualities with their histrionic art, which is a mighty good combination of talents and abilities—as traveling companies go nowadays.

Well, it is rather a disagreeable thing to do to follow our friends in this way—friends whom the fates had transformed into tramps.

And yet, how many another company has gone out with equally brilliant prospects, radiant with hope and good clothes, who have been obliged to "hoof it" back again to the scenes they left with such a flourish.

One thing satisfied them all.

The ladies had been sent ahead, and would not have to share their unpleasant journey; although, if Suckerbait could have had his way, he would have left them to take the same chances that he had to take.

It was a tough old journey, although they did the first hundred miles of it quite briskly; and Dick Dingle raised many a laugh by interviewing the colored people whom they met. Indeed, the fun he managed to knock out of those people would fill a book, and make a story of itself.

But after tramping something over two hundred miles, becoming very footsore, Dick made love to the conductor of a freight train, and chinned him into giving them all a ride in the caboose as far as Austin, the end of his route; and this was indeed a godsend.

But for all that, when they reached Austin they composed one of the sickest and most sorrowful-looking crowds ever seen. How very little like the nobby artists they left New York! Then they were nobby indeed, and now they looked as though they had all gone to seed.

They rested in Austin preparatory to pushing on for St. Louis, where they hoped to meet people so much more prosperous in their profession than they were that they could get a "lift" on their sorrowful way.

But it was while in Austin that something happened, especially to Josh Sheepshank.

He was walking along the street one day with Dick Dingle, whose spirits had almost oozed out at his fingers' ends by this time, when Josh stopped suddenly on being confronted with a well-dressed, tuxom-looking young lady. He seemed puzzled and all broken up, utterly unable to speak, while she sized him up with a smile.

"Well, Josh, how are you?" she finally asked.

"Dolly Dimple, as sure as guns!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Dolly Dimple. I am glad to see you, Josh, but sorry to see you looking so rusty. What has happened you, Josh?"

"Oh, I've been struck by lightning!" said he.

"Well, I should say so, and a pretty bad case of lightning, too. I got your letter, Josh, and just thought I'd come out here and find you."

"Wal, I'm glad somebody has found me, b'gosh."

Dick Dingle raised his hat and walked away, leaving Josh and Dolly to talk things over, and she found him a very sick individual.

But he frankly told her all that had taken place since he left her nearly a year before, and made a clean breast of everything.

Woman-like, she sympathized with him, of course; but, woman-like, also she wanted to know how about those actresses who had kept him upon a string so long, and with whom he was so greatly infatuated.

But he owned up, weakening at every point, and swearing that he never loved either of them half so much as he did her.

"Josh Sheepshank, talk is cheap," said she.

"Yes, an' so be I, b'gosh—darn cheap; I'm a gold-darned fool; I didn't know when I was well off. I wanted to see the world and become famous and suddenly rich, like Jay Gould, but I missed it," said he, sadly.

"And here you are, with all your friends, stranded."

"Yes, dead busted."

"And are going to walk clear home?"

"Yes, if we can't steal or beg rides. But once let me get home again, and you'll never catch me in such a scrape as this again."

"Well, Josh, I have inherited some money since you left home, and if you will only marry me, according to your old promise, I will furnish the money to pay the expenses of the broken company back to New York. But there mustn't be any nonsense about it this time. Marry me first."

Dick Dingle returned by that time, and was not only introduced to Miss Dimple, but made aware of her proposition, and both earnestly and honestly he advised him to go with her to the nearest priest and have the matter fixed up, as he would never have a chance to get so good a wife again.

And then they found some other members of the company who were wandering about the town, and the result was a wedding that closed the bargain, and the next morning the whole company, with the exception of Suckerbait, took first-class passage for home, and he was left to get on the best he could, to pay him for his many meannesses.

And so we ring down the curtain of our jolly play, "Behind the Scenes," knowing that not one of the characters will ever forget the experiences they had while "Out With a New York Combination."

[THE END.]

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